The World's Leading M

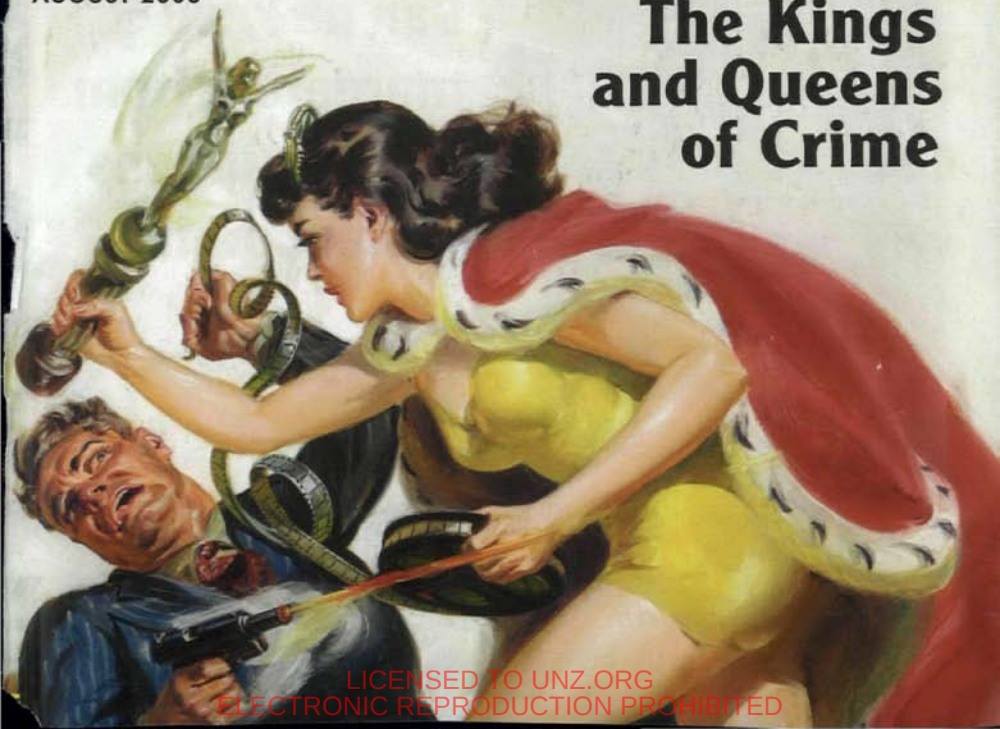
New! Mickey Spillane & Max Allan Collins

ELLERY QUEEN®

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

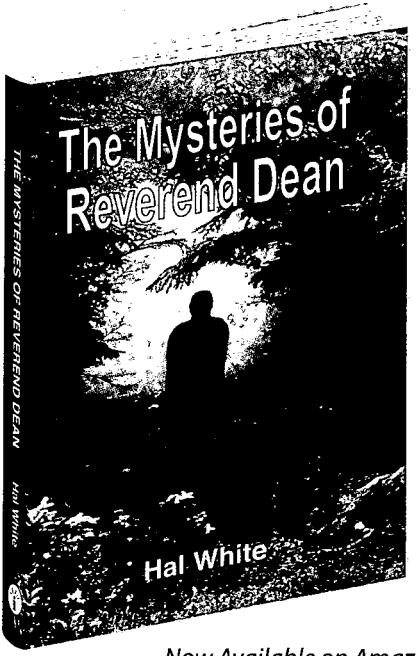
AUGUST 2008

The Kings and Queens of Crime



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

6 STORIES
8 IMPOSSIBLE CRIMES
1 LONELY OLD MAN



Can he keep 6 murderers from committing the perfect crimes?

Can You?

Now Available on Amazon.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AUGUST 2008

CONTENTS

Hot-rodder hero
page 76

Beware of strangers
page 120

Cover art by Norman Saunders, from a 1950 *Black Mask* cover.

Dell Magazines
475 Park Avenue South
New York, NY
10016

Note: indicia on
page 144

www.themysteryplace.com

FICTION

The Fallen BY JAN BURKE 2

The Bonnie and Clyde Caper
BY O'NEIL DE NOUX 24

A Black-Tie Affair
BY BARBARA CLEVERLY 65

Body and Fender
BY JAMES H. COBB 76

Stone Boy Kicked That Blood Clot Around
BY JOHN EDWARD AMES 92

Run for Justice
BY BRENDAN DUBOIS 104

A Nice Old Guy
BY NANCY PICKARD 120

The War in Wonderland
BY EDWARD D. HOCH 131

BLACK MASK

There's A Killer Loose!
BY MICKEY SPILLANE & MAX ALLAN COLLINS ... 50

REVIEWS

Blog Bytes BY BILL CRIDER 39

The Jury Box BY JON L. BREEN 128

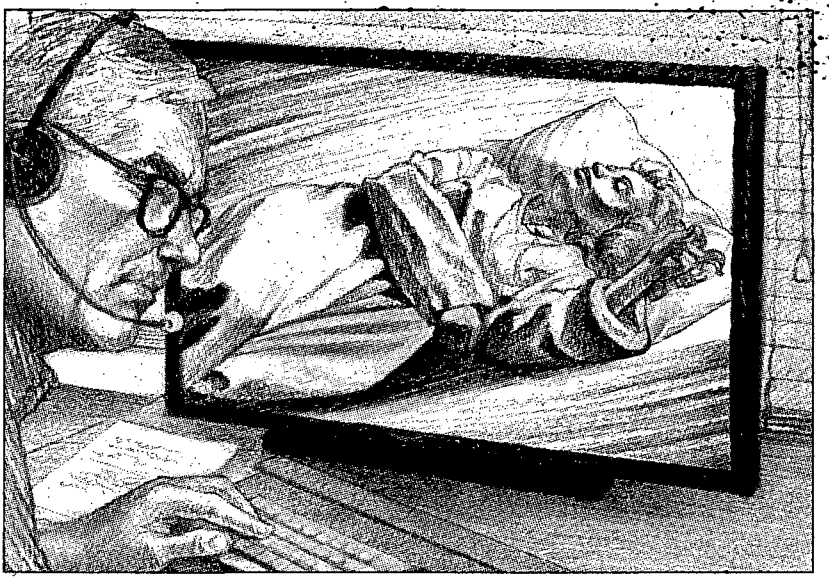
PASSPORT TO CRIME

Death and the Compass
BY JORGE LUIS BORGES 14

DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

Shooting the Moon
BY THOMAS HUMPHREY 40

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Art by Laurie Harden

THE FALLEN

by Jan Burke

He watched her for a moment before he left for work, thinking that he could have drawn a map of her body, served as a kind of cartographer of every plane and curve of her surface as it was not so very long ago. Jared McKay believed he could trace—strictly from memory—Catherine's body as it had been when he had been her explorer, eager to know the line of her neck, the curve of a shoulder blade, the ticklish place behind her knee.

He thought of nights when he had heard her talking on the phone in another room, and of how her voice, used even for the most commonplace conversation, would bring him to her side as surely as any siren's song. And of other nights, when he would sit in an armchair, reading, and become suddenly aware of her, and look up to see her in a doorway. Without a word, she would beckon him with a smile, or with nothing more than a look of secret amusement—a look that would make him need to know that secret, need to pursue it, need to pursue her.

He thought of her silken, golden curls, and of wrapping his fingers in them as he kissed her.

He remembered the feel of her embrace, the length of her against

©2008 by Jan Burke

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him, soft and yet strong, always so strong.

Even in this current state, he thought, his wife was still strong. Holding on to a life that was leaving her. That map redrawn now. A landscape brought to ruin, but which he could still admire.

He heard a sound behind him and turned to see Gracie Moran, one of Catherine's caregivers, enter the room. She was a tall woman, built on almost manly lines. Despite her name, she did not move with grace. This had worried Jared at first, but over the last three months he had never seen her be anything but tender in her care of his wife.

Best Novel Edgar winner Jan Burke has appeared on national bestseller lists and claims a large fan base for her series about Southern California newspaper reporter Irene Kelly. But she has also become well known in recent years as the founder of the Crime Lab Project, an organization devoted to raising public awareness about the underfunding of crime labs. Forensics enter into the latest in the Irene Kelly series, *Kidnapped.*

He had checked out her background, of course, and that of Eldon, her husband. Working in law enforcement had some advantages. He didn't trust background checks entirely, though. He avoided glancing toward the hidden security camera as he bid goodbye to his wife and Gracie.

Not for the first time, he made a useless wish: that he had installed the cameras before she was injured.

Twenty minutes after he left the house, he turned down an alley in the Shore, as this part of the city was known. The alley was at the edge of the Shore's commercial district. It was just before three o'clock on Monday morning, and the alley was empty. One side was lined with businesses—a restaurant, a bar, stores, and a bank. The other side was a mixture of apartment buildings and homes, a residential area that stretched to the beach.

He pulled up behind a three-story, modern box of a house and reached up to the visor over the driver's side to hit the remote clipped there. The smaller of the doors for the three-car garage opened, and he pulled into the only available slot.

The house was being used as a surveillance post. It had little to recommend it other than being vacant at a convenient time, and its location: next to a two-story Spanish Colonial Revival home, currently occupied by the mistress of Daymon Riggs, a local crime boss.

Jared used the remote to close the garage door behind him. He sat in the car even after the overhead light went out and, in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

darkness, listened to the sound of the engine cooling.

Keep moving, he heard Catherine exhorting him from a long-ago conversation. *It makes it harder for the turkeys to find a place to roost.*

He grabbed his computer and went into the house, crossing the darkened kitchen and sparsely furnished living room to reach the stairs. He used the handrail, a recently acquired habit. At the third-floor level, a newly installed heavy door blocked a passage down the hallway. He entered his code and let it scan his thumbprint. The door was an expensive addition to their usual setup, but they wanted this part of the house to be secure from the parade of thieves that visited the house next-door.

The lock hummed and snicked as it released, and Jared opened the door. He could smell a fresh pot of coffee brewing. He made his way down the hall to a large room on the right. A young brunette was sitting at a desk.

Jennifer Albright, from the narcotics squad, was watching the video monitors. "Hi, Jared," she said, glancing up. "All's quiet."

"No visitors?"

"Not even lover boy."

He heard the toilet flush in the bathroom across the hall.

"You doing okay?" Jennifer asked, standing up and stretching. But beneath the question he heard the concern he'd heard at every shift change. *Are you really ready to be back on the job?*

"Yes, fine. You?"

She laughed. "Me, I'm always good." She paused and, hearing footsteps in the hall, added, "Any time you want your old partner back, though—"

"Hey, Jen—don't think that wouldn't make me happy, too," Max Harrell said, coming into the room. "How's it going, Jer?"

"Fine, Max," he said. "You look like hell, though."

"Yeah, well, working twelve-hour shifts never agreed with me. I'll be glad when this assignment's over. How's Catherine?"

"The same."

He had given the same answer every day, and every day, Max looked stricken, as if the news had been about his own wife.

"How's Mary?" Jared asked, doing his part in the routine.

Before Max could answer, Jennifer rolled her eyes and said, "I'm going to get going. I hear enough about snookum-ookums, thank you very much."

"Jealous," Max said.

"Yeah, right. See you this afternoon, Jared."

When she had left, Max said, "Mary's fine. She said to tell you she'd be happy to come over and sit with Catherine or—anything else she could do to help you out. Same here. I'd be glad to come over. You know I would."

"Thanks. I know you two love her, but—remember her the way

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you knew her, Max. She's—I don't think she'd want you or Mary to remember her the way she is now."

Tears came to Max's eyes. He choked out, "Are you sure there's nothing that can be done for her? I mean, another doctor—"

"We've been over this, Max, and I have to tell you, it doesn't make it any easier for me to have to keep telling you that she's dying, and nothing will stop her from dying. She's dying at home, with what dignity can be managed, and without pain, which is all anyone can do for her now. Now or ever. I wish to God you'd accept that." The words had come out sounding angrier than he had meant them to, but he didn't apologize.

After a stunned moment, it was Max who offered an apology. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It just seems so strange . . ."

Jared said nothing.

"I mean, she falls down the stairs, and that's when they find out she has brain cancer?"

Jared sighed.

"Sorry," Max said quickly. "I know. I know. She probably fell because of the tumor. You've told me that a million times, haven't you?"

"Not that many."

"But close." Max took out his handkerchief and wiped at his face. "Look at me, will you? God, don't tell Jennifer I was in here bawling like a baby." He took a moment to compose himself, then said, "When all this is over, you and me, we're teaming up again, okay? I mean, Jen's okay, but it's not the same."

Jared was glad when Max left, glad to be alone with his thoughts. He realized that he had forgotten to thank Jennifer for making the coffee, and after pouring a mug of it, wrote a note to remind himself to mention it when she came back on for the next shift. He had an excellent memory, but lately, under the strain of dealing with Catherine's illness, he found he needed to make notes.

He had asked for this shift, and asked his lieutenant not to pair him back up with Max just yet. He had used the excuse of not being sure how soon he'd need bereavement leave, but the fact was, he couldn't handle Max's fussing over him. The lieutenant, another member of Catherine's fan club, had been sympathetic. In truth, Jared wasn't sure how much longer he'd last on the job, although just now it provided him a much needed distraction.

He immersed himself in that distraction now. He reviewed Jennifer's notes. The woman they were watching, Lillian Barr, had spent the afternoon and evening at home. The house, in addition to serving as Riggs's love nest, seemed to be a kind of meeting place for Riggs and his associates. Jennifer and Max covered the busiest hours. Working from three in the morning until three in the afternoon, Jared rarely observed anyone other than Riggs and Lillian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entering or leaving the house. Lillian seemed to be a night owl of sorts.

Today had been quiet even for Jennifer and Max's shift, though.

Their investigations into Lillian's past had revealed that she was now twenty-seven, had a degree in English, and was estranged from her family and college friends. She had earned some of her money for college as a model, and when that work dried up, for one night as a dancer in a strip club. The club was owned by Riggs. He saw her dance, invited her to have a drink with him, and had apparently decided he'd give her a personal scholarship. She was in his company fairly constantly after that, set up at first in an apartment, and then here. Riggs's wife of nineteen years didn't seem to mind that he was rarely at home, but Lillian was hardly his first mistress. The current Mrs. Riggs held that title.

Lillian didn't seem to be involved in the scheming that went on, other than providing a place where information was dropped off or meetings were held. When Riggs was there and his cronies arrived, she went for a walk, did some shopping, or, now that the days were warmer, went up to the rooftop. She had created a garden there, and spent time caring for the plants or reading.

A quiet and demure young woman, to outside appearances. Detectives who had tracked her movements when she was away from the house said that although she attracted the attention of males young and old wherever she went, she never spoke to them, other than to rebuff an approach. Now and then, Riggs had provided one of his men as an escort, but one sign of the degree to which he trusted the young woman was the number of times she went out alone.

The surveillance here, combined with a phone tap, had already allowed Jared's team to recover a cargo container full of stolen vehicles down at the port. They had enough to incriminate Riggs himself, but the D.A.—in Jared's view, almost as greedy a bastard as Riggs—wanted more. So they had let it out to the media that the cars had been a lucky discovery made by harbor security.

Some new plan was developing, judging from the recent guest list at Lillian's place. It made Jared wonder why she had been left alone today.

Inevitably, his thoughts turned to Catherine. He opened his computer, made the Wi-Fi connection, and checked on the cameras live. She was sleeping, her mouth slightly open, her breathing labored. Her golden curls were gone now, and her cheeks were hollow, but he still loved that face, still saw who had been there before his life fell down the stairs with hers.

Gracie sat next to her, reading. He knew he could call home and ask about her, even though it was now an hour before dawn. But he also knew that there would be nothing new to tell him. If her condition changed rapidly, Gracie or Eldon would call.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He closed the connection, and put the computer away. He should be watching the house next-door. He had no sooner thought this than one of the alley cameras picked up the light of headlamps.

Riggs had arrived. He was carrying a large suitcase. Jared made a note in the log.

Their ability to pick up conversation from next-door was imperfect to say the least. Never completely able to hear everything being said, for the last week they had rarely been able to make out much of any conversation. A technician was supposed to come and check their equipment. Jared was fairly sure that Riggs had installed some kind of soundproofing or a jamming device. But tonight, doing his best to pick up a greeting or other words, Jared didn't even register the sound of voices.

Lillian must be asleep, he decided.

The light went on briefly on the lower floor, and watching them Jared could trace Riggs's passage through the house. Very briefly downstairs, he moved to the second story, used an upstairs bathroom, and, without turning on other lights, moved to Lillian's bedroom.

Jared found himself envying Riggs, not for the youth and beauty of his companion, but because she was healthy enough to withstand having someone lie next to her. Catherine was now so frail, Jared dared not do more than sit next to her on her hospital bed.

His thoughts went to the nights when he would come in late and try not to disturb her as he crawled into bed next to her. She would always awaken, at least briefly, and pull him into an embrace. They slept in the nude, and the feel of her against him never failed to arouse him. Most of the time, he had to wait restlessly for that to pass, for she would not remain awake, and he didn't have the heart to bother her. But there had been those times when she had not so quickly fallen back to sleep . . .

As the sun came up over the roofs of the houses between here and the ocean, he faced facts, something the cold dawn seemed to insist upon. In recent years, since making detective, he hadn't been much of a husband to her. His working hours were long and uncertain, the stress high. She had rolled with it, but they had been growing apart. It seemed to him now that he had squandered something invaluable, and he could not reconcile himself to its loss.

He thought through all the facts of that last day—the last one when she had been whole.

They were few.

Fact: It was a Tuesday. He had been in a courthouse in Riverside County, two hours away, where a change of venue had taken one of his cases. He had been waiting to testify. He called home to say that the defendant had decided to enter a plea, so he'd be back early. He offered to take her to a romantic restaurant for dinner. She happily agreed to the plan. She had told him she loved him. They were the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last words she would speak to him.

Fact: She had fallen from the top of the stairs. She apparently lost her balance while carrying laundry—she had stripped their bed. Later, in the waiting hours at the hospital, he would focus on this nonsensical bit of information. Why had she varied from routine and washed laundry on a Tuesday instead of Monday? He almost felt angry with her for it—this is what had caused the accident, a change in routine.

When he came home and found her—perhaps as much as two hours after the fall, although probably less—she had been entangled in the sheets and pillowcases on which they had slept the night before. He thought perhaps she had just showered, preparing for their evening out, for she was wearing a bathrobe, and where it was not bloodied, her hair was damp.

Fact: In the course of his work he had seen blood, seen the human body mangled beyond recognition. But nothing prepared a man to see his wife's face bloodied, her shoulder and arm broken, her knee at a wrong angle.

The bones would heal. The cuts and abrasions would heal. What was killing his wife had been there before the fall.

The skull fracture had caused concern. And indeed, it was severe, and caused its own set of problems. But it didn't win first place on his list of that day's disasters. While reviewing images of her brain, the doctors discovered a tumor. He numbly gave permission for a biopsy. The tumor was malignant.

Had it caused the fall?

Possibly, they said. But it was just as likely that the fall was an unlucky accident, one that just happened to reveal the tumor's presence. She had stepped on the corner of a trailing sheet, perhaps, and tripped. Or simply missed a stair. The tumor wasn't in a part of the brain that would necessarily have caused her to have problems with balance. Had he noticed any lack of coordination in her before?

No. No, she had always moved with grace.

The doctors made noncommittal, non-word noises.

So now they could remove the tumor? he asked.

They shook their heads and looked—the word that came to his mind was "grave."

What a horrible word, he thought, and wept.

In those first hours, he was too distraught to think clearly. Max and his wife, Mary, came to the hospital, sat in the halls with him. There had been others—neighbors, friends, coworkers. In this department, people pulled together in times of trouble.

As it happened, Max had been by the house earlier in the day, around ten, to drop off some paperwork for Jared, and had briefly seen Catherine. A neighbor had come by at about two-thirty, to drop off a misdelivered piece of mail, but Catherine had seemed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

busy, so she hadn't stayed. He had envied both of them—irrationally, he wanted to have their privilege, to have seen his wife whole, to have had that last glimpse of an undamaged Catherine to himself.

But she wasn't undamaged, he reminded himself, not even in the hours before the fall.

Although it was clear that there was nothing Max could have done to help her if he had arrived after she fell, as they sat waiting for the surgery to be over, Max kept berating himself for not having foreseen the unforeseeable. Eventually, Mary caught on to how wearisome Jared was finding this, and convinced Max that they should let him have some time to himself. She offered to clean up Jared and Catherine's house, an offer for which Jared was grateful.

"The bedding—" he called to her—"please throw it out."

Mary nodded, seeming to understand his anger at bedsheets.

Catherine never fully regained consciousness. The tumor defied treatment.

And now, he spent his days observing Lillian, a beautiful stranger, and her criminal lover and friends, all the while not caring about any of them. But as distractions went, it served its purpose.

"Well, well, well," said Detective Jennifer Albright, looking at the monitor. "Look who's giving her appliances the afternoon off."

Max glanced at Jared, then went to the window for a direct look. He took a careful peek through the blinds, down at the rooftop next door. "Holy cow."

"Her knockers aren't *that* big," Albright said.

"Very funny," Max said, then turned back toward Jared. "Could have warned me."

"What?" Jared said, yawning.

"Listen to this guy," he said with a laugh, then went back to staring out the window. "She sure is something. I don't blame Riggs for making her his mistress. Any sign of lover boy?"

"He arrived at four, stayed until six, then left," Jared said. "He brought a suitcase in, nothing out."

"Well, if there were clothes in it," Jennifer said, "They must not have been in her size. How long has she been on display?"

"She's been nude sunbathing for about an hour, since about two." He shrugged on a light jacket.

"Hey, Jen, let me take first watch on the monitors," Max said.

"Oh, something has your interest, eh?"

"I'm a married man," he said.

"As if all hound dogs are single guys. Give me a break."

"See you tomorrow," Jared said. He headed for the stairs.

Tomorrow would be Tuesday. He hated Tuesdays.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He turned his thoughts to Riggs, and the suitcase, and Lillian's newly brazen behavior, as he made his way downstairs. Something was going on. What?

He had just put his computer into the trunk of the car when Jennifer caught up with him.

"Jared! You left this." She was holding up his notebook.

"Oh, thanks." Seeing it reminded him of the first note he had made in it yesterday. "I also meant to say—thanks for always making coffee for me. It's thoughtful of you."

She waved it off. "No biggie. You sure as hell don't want Max's coffee."

"I know." He closed the trunk, hesitated, then said, "You get along with him okay?"

"As long as I don't think about what he's doing to Mary."

"I don't understand . . ."

"He cheats on her, you know. Sure you know—you were his partner."

"Uh—"

"Oh hell. You didn't know."

"No," he admitted.

"Well, I suppose I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure. All the danger signs are there, anyway. First thing that clued me in was the love talk."

"Love talk?"

"All the honey-bunny, kissy-kissy stuff on the phone. I have yet to meet a man who talks like that to his wife who wasn't getting some skirt somewhere on the side."

"But that's surely not enough to—"

"Course not. Buys her little presents unexpectedly. Guilt."

"I don't know, maybe he's just devoted."

"He never asked you to tell Mary he was with you—when he wasn't?"

"No," he said, incredulous. "He's asked you to do that?"

"Oh, yes. I told him he'd better look elsewhere for an alibi. He tried to make out like all he was doing was trying not to worry her about a night out with the boys. The boys. My ass."

He shook his head. "Wow. I feel so stupid." He felt embarrassed—for Mary, for Jen, and even for Max—but, he admitted, mostly for himself. Why didn't Max tell him? They had been partners, for God's sake.

"Nobody's ever going to say that you're stupid, Jared. That's why it's good to have you back. No one in the department doubts that you're sharper than ninety-nine percent of the other folks working in Detectives, including Max."

"Not sharp enough to figure out my own partner was stepping out on his wife," Jared said. He frowned. "But looking back—I don't know. Changes in routine every once in a while . . ."

"Don't be so hard on yourself. You were his friend, and he proba-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bly didn't want you to think less of him, so he took extra care to hide it from you."

"Like he takes extra care to hide it from Mary."

She opened her mouth, seemed to reconsider what she was about to say, and closed it.

They studied each other in silence for a moment before she said, "Well, then, maybe it's something new, you know, since the time he partnered up with me. Maybe I'm totally wrong."

"Yeah, maybe."

"You take care, Jared."

"You, too." He started to get in the car, then said, "Jen?"

"Yeah?"

"He ever bother you? You know—"

"Hit on me?" She laughed. "No, I told him straight out, first night on the job, that I'd knock him out cold if he so much as called me 'honey.' Besides, he's got the girl next-door to drool over. He's crazy about blondes." For some reason, she blushed. Then she said she'd better get upstairs before Max wondered if she'd quit the job.

He wasn't sure, later, how he'd managed to drive home without getting into an accident.

He relieved Eldon, who had taken over for Gracie some hours ago. "You spend time with your wife, I'll spend time with mine," Jared said.

He took Catherine's thin hand in his. As always, he found peace when he sat with her. She made it easier for him to think, or, rather, to find what lay just beyond his worries, to find what really mattered most.

A little later, he called his lieutenant.

"I think our presence and our setup there at Lillian's has been blown somehow. Riggs completely broke the routine." He described the day without visitors. "And although it has been warm out, she's never gone up to the roof wearing anything immodest. Today she was nude sunbathing. Maybe something big is happening somewhere else, because she's putting on a show. She may have been given a farewell present last night." He told the lieutenant about the suitcase. "I think we should make sure we know where Riggs is right now."

The lieutenant agreed it was worth looking into.

Two hours later, he called to say that Riggs has been arrested. Riggs had been planning to flee the country on a yacht. His wife was with him, wearing jewelry that matched a description of some items stolen from a safe-deposit box in a bank robbery. "He also had a lot of unlaundered money with him."

"Glad to know you caught him."

"You okay? I mean, for a guy who has just helped us bring in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

big fish, you seem kind of quiet."

"A lot on my mind these days. Sorry."

The lieutenant was immediately contrite. "Oh, no. I'm the one who owes you an apology. Anyway, thanks to you, it looks as if Riggs is finally going to be put away. So—take a few days off. I'm canceling the surveillance job for now."

Jared hesitated, then said, "I'd like to help Max and Jennifer pack up—"

"Sure, sure. But after that, take it easy."

Jared drove back to the surveillance house. He found Jennifer and Max already at work on disconnecting equipment.

Max smiled at him. "Spoil sport."

"I won't miss these shifts," Jennifer said. "Good work, Jared."

"Thanks. Mind giving me a moment with Max?"

Her brows drew together in an anxious look, but she said, "Not at all. Holler when you're ready to have me help out again."

After they heard the stairway door close, Max said, "What's on your mind, Jer?"

"Laundry."

"What?"

"Catherine always did laundry on Mondays. She did it that Monday as usual."

"You'll pardon me if I don't know what you're talking about," Max said, but he looked away, and his body language told Jared that Max knew exactly what he was talking about. Until that moment, he hadn't been sure it was Max.

"So why does a woman wash sheets that are clean?" Jared asked. "In this case, because they aren't clean. She doesn't want her husband to smell sex on them—sex she had with another man."

Max looked up at him.

"Were you still around when the neighbor came by with the mail? Was that why Catherine seemed so 'busy'?"

"I was only there for a few minutes! Dropping off papers."

"Did you push her down the stairs?"

"No! Jared—honest to God. I mean—what are you talking about?"

"About you and Catherine having an affair. Having sex in my home, in my bed. Please don't bother lying to me."

Max lowered his gaze again. He started crying. Jared felt unmoved by his tears.

"You like blondes, right? Was she just another blonde?"

"No. And you might not believe this, but we didn't even do it. I mean, I had talked her into it, because you were gone on that case, and I could tell you weren't giving her what she needed—"

"Not a wise course of argument to pursue," Jared said tightly.

"I'm telling you, I got into the bed, and she just stood there, looking at me, and said she couldn't do it, didn't want to hurt you, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told me to get the hell out. Said she felt dirty. She started pulling the sheets off the bed right while I was there. That was in the morning, so she must have washed them and been putting them back on when . . . when . . ."

"I'd love to believe you. I'm not sure I do. But I am sure I could kill you without thinking twice about it."

Max looked alarmed.

"I won't. Not for your sake. But for Catherine's. I kill you and the whole department is going to figure out why."

"I never told anyone. No one!"

"I'll bet you didn't. But you know what? I think that new partner of yours may have already made a guess at it." He thought again of Jennifer's blush when she mentioned Max's weakness for blondes. "I'm almost sure she has."

"Just a guess, then, that's all—I never said so."

"I want you to retire."

"What?"

"You've got enough years in. Retire."

"Why should I?"

"You're going to retire, because otherwise I will make your life miserable. I'll refuse to work with you, and people will ask why. And, nobly, I won't say a word. That will guarantee that you'll fall under suspicion. I will make it my mission to find every woman you've ever slept with since you were married, and ask questions about how they were approached. Do you think I can't do it?"

"Jared—look, this has nothing to do with my work as a cop—"

"Tell me you've never used your badge to win a woman's trust, and I'll leave it alone."

Max fell silent.

"Well?"

"All right, all right!"

"One other thing," Jared said, going to the door.

"Jesus, what more do you want?"

"Catherine's going to die, probably any day now. Don't you dare show your face at her funeral."

"You're never going to forgive me, are you?"

Jared sighed. "If I hadn't already forgiven you, Max, your funeral would be held before hers."

He lay next to his dying wife, holding her frail and yet not alien form, thinking over what he wanted to say to her. He held her hand, and told her he loved her. He told her that if she worried that he didn't forgive her, she should stop worrying. "I fell first," he whispered. "I fell away from you. Forgive me, Catherine."

He thought she squeezed his hand, but he couldn't be quite sure.

He decided to take it on faith that she had.

With love, one so often had to take things on faith. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PASSPORT TO CRIME

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Sixty years ago this month, a short story entitled "The Garden of Forking Paths," by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1985), appeared in the August, 1948, "All Nations" issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. It had been translated by Anthony Boucher, who, as author, critic, and translator from Spanish and French, was a frequent contributor to *EQMM*. Boucher had become interested in the development of crime fiction in Spanish America and he persuaded Borges to let him enter this extraordinary tale in *EQMM*'s third annual short story contest. Borges, long a devotee of mystery fiction, readily agreed. It was awarded a special prize as one of the best foreign stories submitted.

Borges, in time, emerged as one of the most important writers in Spanish America. For decades he was a highly regarded candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature, an honor it was his destiny not to receive.

EQMM has long enjoyed a special distinction, since "The Garden of Forking Paths" was the first of Borges's writings to appear in the English language. I met Borges in Buenos Aires in 1962 and he spoke with pride about that 1948 award. I asked him to sign the opening page of his story in my copy of the "All Nations" issue. Years later, I took that copy to Frederic Dannay, the magazine's editor, and asked him if he would also sign that page. He smiled and wrote, above his name, "So this is the story that has made me famous!"

In the mid 1950s I had begun to translate Borges's tales into English. The first of these was "Death and the Compass," which was actually more of a formal detective story than "The Garden of Forking Paths." It appeared as part of the Borges collection *Labyrinths* in 1962 but has never before been published in *EQMM*.

There is a secret antecedent to the appearance here of Borges's famous detective story. In the June 2008 issue of *EQMM*, the "Passport to Crime" selection was a story entitled "The Center of the Web" by Christián X. Ferdinandus (the pseudonym of the Argentine writers Cristián Mitelman and Fernando Sorrentino). It was written especially for *EQMM* and is an ingeniously conceived homage to Borges's "Death and the Compass." A rereading of the story in the June issue will suggest how inspiring the "master's" tale has been for these two Argentine authors.

—Donald A. Yates

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Death and the Compass

by Jorge Luis Borges

Of the many problems that exercised the reckless discernment of Lönnrot, none was so strange—so rigorously strange, shall we say—as the periodic series of bloody events that culminated at the villa of Triste-le-Roy, amid the ceaseless aroma of the eucalypti. It is true that Erik Lönnrot failed to prevent the last murder, but that he foresaw it is indisputable. Nor did he guess the identity of Yarmolinsky's luckless assassin, but he did succeed in divining the secret morphology behind the fiendish series as well as the participation of Red Scharlach, whose other nickname is Scharlach the Dandy. That criminal (as countless others) had sworn on his honor to kill Lönnrot, but the latter could never be intimidated. Lönnrot believed himself a pure reasoner, an Auguste Dupin, but there was something of the adventurer in him, and even a little of the gambler.

The first murder occurred in the Hôtel du Nord—that tall prism which dominates the estuary whose waters are the color of the desert. To that tower (which quite glaringly unites the hateful whiteness of a hospital, the numbered divisibility of a jail, and the general appearance of a bordello) there came on the third day of December the delegate from Podolsk to the Third Talmudic Congress, Dr. Marcel Yarmolinsky, a gray-bearded man with gray eyes. We shall never know whether the Hôtel du Nord pleased him; he accepted it with the ancient resignation that had allowed him to endure three years of war in the Carpathians and three thousand years of oppression and pogroms. He was given a room on Floor R, across from the suite that was occupied—not without splendor—by the tetrarch of Galilee. Yarmolinsky supped, postponed until the following day an inspection of the unknown city, arranged in a *placard* his many books and few personal possessions, and before midnight extinguished his light. (Thus declared the tetrarch's chauffeur who slept in the adjoining room.) On the fourth, at 11:03 A.M., the editor of the *Yidische Zaitung* put in a call to him; Dr. Yarmolinsky did not answer. He was found in his room, his face already a little dark, nearly nude beneath a large, anachronistic cape. He was lying not far from the door that opened on the hall; a deep knife wound had split his breast. A few hours later, in the same room, amid jour-

From LABYRINTHS, © 1962, 1964 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nalists, photographers, and policemen, Inspector Treviranus and Lönnrot were calmly discussing the problem.

"No need to look for a three-legged cat here," Treviranus was saying as he brandished an imperious cigar. "We all know that the Tetrarch of Galilee owns the finest sapphires in the world. Someone, intending to steal them, must have broken in here by mistake. Yarmolinsky got up; the robber had to kill him. How does it sound to you?"

"Possible, but not interesting," Lönnrot answered. "You'll reply that reality hasn't the least obligation to be interesting. And I'll answer you that reality may avoid that obligation but that hypotheses may not. In the hypothesis that you propose, chance intervenes copiously. Here we have a dead rabbi; I would prefer a purely rabbinical explanation, not the imaginary mischances of an imaginary robber."

Treviranus replied ill-humoredly:

"I'm not interested in rabbinical explanations. I am interested in capturing the man who stabbed this unknown person."

"Not so unknown," corrected Lönnrot. "Here are his complete works." He indicated in the wall-cupboard a row of tall books: a *Vindication of the Cabala; An Examination of the Philosophy of Robert Fludd;* a literal translation of the *Sepher Yezirah;* a *Biography of the Baal Shem;* a *History of the Hasidic Sect;* a monograph (in German) on the Tetragrammaton; another, on the divine nomenclature of the Pentateuch. The inspector regarded them with dread, almost with repulsion. Then he began to laugh.

"I'm a poor Christian," he said. "Carry off those musty volumes if you want; I don't have any time to waste on Jewish superstitions."

"Maybe the crime belongs to the history of Jewish superstitions," murmured Lönnrot.

"Like Christianity," the editor of the *Yidische Zaitung* ventured to add. He was myopic, an atheist, and very shy.

No one answered him. One of the agents had found in the small typewriter a piece of paper on which was written the following unfinished sentence:

The first letter of the Name has been uttered

Lönnrot abstained from smiling. Suddenly become a bibliophile or Hebraist, he ordered a package made of the dead man's books and carried them off to his apartment. Indifferent to the police investigation, he dedicated himself to studying them. One large octavo volume revealed to him the teachings of Israel Baal Shem Tobh, founder of the sect of the Pious; another, the virtues and terrors of the Tetragrammaton, which is the unutterable name of God; another, the thesis that God has a secret name, in which is epitomized (as in the crystal sphere which the Persians ascribe to Alexander of Macedonia) his ninth attribute, eternity—that is to say, the immediate knowledge of all things that will be, that are, and that have been in the universe. Tradition numbers ninety-nine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

names of God; the Hebraists attribute that imperfect number to magical fear of even numbers; the Hasidim reason that that hiatus indicates a hundredth name—the Absolute Name.

From this erudition Lönnrot was distracted, a few days later, by the appearance of the editor of the *Yidische Zaitung.* The latter wanted to talk about the murder; Lönnrot preferred to discuss the diverse names of God; the journalist declared, in three columns, that the investigator, Erik Lönnrot, had dedicated himself to studying the names of God in order to come across the name of the murderer. Lönnrot, accustomed to the simplifications of journalism, did not become indignant. One of those shopkeepers who have discovered that any given man can be persuaded to buy any given book published a popular edition of the *History of the Hasidic Sect.*

The second murder occurred on the evening of the third of January, in the most deserted and empty corner of the capital's western suburbs. Towards dawn, one of the gendarmes who patrol those solitudes on horseback saw a man in a poncho lying prone in the shadow of an old paint shop. The harsh features seemed to be masked in blood; a deep knife wound had split his breast. On the wall, across the yellow and red diamonds, were some words written in chalk. The gendarme spelled them out . . . That afternoon, Treviranus and Lönnrot headed for the remote scene of the crime. To the left and right of the automobile the city disintegrated; the firmament grew and houses were of less importance than a brick kiln or a poplar tree. They arrived at their miserable destination: an alley's end, with rose-colored walls that somehow seemed to reflect the extravagant sunset. The dead man had already been identified. He was Daniel Simon Azevedo, an individual of some fame in the old northern suburbs, who had risen from wagon driver to political tough, then degenerated to a thief and even an informer. (The singular style of his death seemed appropriate to them: Azevedo was the last representative of a generation of bandits who knew how to manipulate a dagger, but not a revolver.) The words in chalk were the following:

The second letter of the Name has been uttered

The third murder occurred on the night of the third of February. A little before one o'clock, the telephone in Inspector Treviranus's office rang. In avid secretiveness, a man with a guttural voice spoke; he said his name was Ginzberg (or Ginsburg) and that he was prepared to communicate, for reasonable remuneration, the events surrounding the two sacrifices of Azevedo and Yarmolinsky. A discordant sound of whistles and horns drowned out the informer's voice. Then, the connection was broken off. Without yet rejecting the possibility of a hoax (after all, it was carnival time), Treviranus found out that he had been called from the Liverpool House, a tavern on the rue de Toulon, that dingy street where side by side exist the cosmorama and the coffee shop, the bawdy house and the Bible sellers. Treviranus spoke with the owner. The latter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Black Finnegan, an old Irish criminal who was immersed in, almost overcome by, respectability) told him that the last person to use the phone was a lodger, a certain Gryphius, who had just left with some friends. Treviranus went immediately to Liverpool House. The owner related the following. Eight days before Gryphius had rented a room above the tavern. He was a sharp-featured man with a nebulous gray beard, and was shabbily dressed in black; Finnegan (who used the room for a purpose that Treviranus guessed) demanded a rent that was undoubtedly excessive; Gryphius paid the stipulated sum without hesitation. He almost never went out; he dined and lunched in his room; his face was scarcely known in the bar. On the night in question, he came downstairs to make a phone call from Finnegan's office. A closed cab stopped in front of the tavern. The driver didn't move from his seat; several patrons recalled that he was wearing a bear's mask. Two harlequins got out of the cab; they were of short stature and no one failed to observe that they were very drunk. With a tooting of horns, they burst into Finnegan's office; they embraced Gryphius, who appeared to recognize them but responded coldly; they exchanged a few words in Yiddish—he in a low, guttural voice, they in high-pitched, false voices—and then went up to his room. Within a quarter-hour the three descended, very happy. Gryphius, staggering, seemed as drunk as the others. He walked—tall and dizzy—in the middle, between the masked harlequins. (One of the women at the bar remembered the yellow, red, and green diamonds.) Twice he stumbled; twice he was caught and held by the harlequins. Moving off toward the inner harbor, which enclosed a rectangular body of water, the three got into the cab and disappeared. From the footboard of the cab, the last of the harlequins had scrawled an obscene figure and a sentence on one of the slates of the pier shed.

Treviranus saw the sentence. It was virtually predictable. It said:

The last of the letters of the Name has been uttered

Afterwards, he examined the small room of Gryphius-Ginzberg. On the floor there was a brusque star of blood, in the corners, traces of cigarettes of a Hungarian brand; in a cabinet, a book in Latin—the *Philologus Hebraeo-Graecus* (1739) of Leusden—with several manuscript notes. Treviranus looked it over with indignation and had Lönnrot located. The latter, without removing his hat, began to read while the inspector was interrogating the contradictory witnesses to the possible kidnapping. At four o'clock they left. Out on the twisted rue de Toulon, as they were treading on the dead serpentines of the dawn, Treviranus said:

"And what if all this business tonight were just a mock rehearsal?"

Erik Lönnrot smiled and, with all gravity, read a passage (which was underlined) from the thirty-third dissertation of the *Philologus: "Dies Judaeorum incipit a solis occasu usque ad solis occasum diei sequentis."*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This means," he added, " 'The Hebrew day begins at sundown and lasts until the following sundown.' "

The inspector attempted an ironic comment.

"Is that fact the most valuable one you've come across tonight?"

"No. Even more valuable was a word that Ginzberg used."

The afternoon papers did not overlook the periodic disappearances. *La Cruz de la Espada* contrasted them with the admirable discipline and order of the last Hermetical Congress; Ernst Palast, in *El Mártir,* criticized "the intolerable delays in this clandestine and frugal pogrom, which has taken three months to murder three Jews"; the *Yidische Zaitung* rejected the horrible hypothesis of an anti-Semitic plot, "even though many penetrating intellects admit no other solution to the triple mystery"; the most illustrious gunman of the south, Dandy Red Scharlach, swore that in his district similar crimes could never occur, and he accused Inspector Franz Treviranus of culpable negligence.

On the night of March first, the inspector received an impressive-looking sealed envelope. He opened it; the envelope contained a letter signed "Baruch Spinoza" and a detailed plan of the city, obviously torn from a Baedeker. The letter prophesied that on the third of March there would not be a fourth murder, since the paint shop in the west, the tavern on the rue de Toulon, and the Hôtel du Nord were "the perfect vertices of a mystic equilateral triangle"; the map demonstrated in red ink the regularity of the triangle. Treviranus read the *more geometrico* argument with resignation, and sent the letter and the map to Lönnrot—who, unquestionably, was deserving of such nonsense.

Erik Lönnrot studied them. The three locations were in fact equidistant. Symmetry in time (the third of December, the third of January, the third of February); symmetry in space as well . . . Suddenly, he felt as if he were on the point of solving the mystery. A set of calipers and a compass completed his quick intuition. He smiled, pronounced the word Tetragrammaton (of recent acquisition), and phoned the inspector. He said:

"Thank you for the equilateral triangle you sent me last night. It has enabled me to solve the problem. This Friday the criminals will be in jail, we may rest assured."

"Then they're not planning a fourth murder?"

"Precisely because they *are* planning a fourth murder we can rest assured." Lönnrot hung up. One hour later he was traveling on one of the Southern Railway's trains, in the direction of the abandoned villa of Triste-le-Roy. To the south of the city of our story, flows a blind little river of muddy water, defamed by refuse and garbage. On the far side is an industrial suburb where, under the protection of a political boss from Barcelona, gunmen thrive. Lönnrot smiled at the thought that the most celebrated gunman of all—Red Scharlach—would have given a great deal to know of his clandestine visit. Azevedo had been an associate of Scharlach; Lönnrot con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sidered the remote possibility that the fourth victim might be Scharlach himself. Then he rejected the idea . . . He had very nearly deciphered the problem; mere circumstances, reality (names, prison records, faces, judicial and penal proceedings) hardly interested him now. He wanted to go for a stroll, he wanted to rest from three months of sedentary investigation. He reflected that the explanation of the murders was in an anonymous triangle and a dusty Greek word. The mystery appeared almost crystalline to him now; he was mortified to have dedicated a hundred days to it.

The train stopped at a silent loading station. Lönnrot got off. It was one of those deserted afternoons that seem like dawns. The air of the turbid, puddled plain was damp and cold. Lönnrot began walking along the countryside. He saw dogs, he saw a car on a siding, he saw the horizon, he saw a silver-colored horse drinking the crapulous water of a puddle. It was growing dark when he saw the rectangular belvedere of the villa of Triste-le-Roy, almost as tall as the black eucalypti that surrounded it. He thought that scarcely one dawning and one nightfall (an ancient splendor in the east and another in the west) separated him from the moment long desired by the seekers of the Name.

A rusty wrought-iron fence defined the irregular perimeter of the villa. The main gate was closed. Lönnrot, without much hope of getting in, circled the area. Once again before the insurmountable gate, he placed his hand between the bars almost mechanically and encountered the bolt. The creaking of the iron surprised him. With a laborious passivity the entire gate swung back.

Lönnrot advanced among the eucalypti, treading on confused generations of rigid, broken leaves. Viewed from anear, the house of the villa of Triste-le-Roy abounded in pointless symmetries and in maniacal repetitions: to one Diana in a murky niche corresponded a second Diana in another niche; one balcony was reflected in another balcony; double stairways led to double balustrades. A two-faced Hermes projected a monstrous shadow. Lönnrot circled the house as he had the villa. He examined everything; beneath the level of the terrace he saw a narrow metal shutter.

He pushed it; a few marble steps descended to a vault. Lönnrot, who had now perceived the architect's preferences, guessed that at the opposite wall there would be another stairway. He found it, ascended, raised his hands, and opened the trap door.

A brilliant light led him to a window. He opened it: a yellow, rounded moon defined two silent fountains in the melancholy garden. Lönnrot explored the house. Through anterooms and galleries he passed to duplicate patios, and time after time to the same patio. He ascended the dusty stairs to circular antechambers; he was multiplied infinitely in opposing mirrors; he grew tired of opening or half-opening windows that revealed outside the same desolate garden from various heights and various angles; inside,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pieces of furniture wrapped in yellow dust sheets and chandeliers bound up in tarlatan. A bedroom detained him; in that bedroom, one single flower in a porcelain vase; at the first touch the ancient petals fell apart. On the second floor, on the top floor, the house seemed infinite and expanding. *The house is not this large,* he thought. *Other things are making it seem larger: the dim light, the symmetry, the mirrors, so many years, my unfamiliarity, the loneliness.*

By way of a spiral staircase he arrived at the oriel. The early-evening moon shone through the diamonds of the window; they were yellow, red, and green. An astonishing, dizzying recollection struck him.

Two men of short stature, robust and ferocious, threw themselves on him and disarmed him; another, very tall, saluted him gravely and said:

"You are very kind. You have saved us a night and a day."

It was Red Scharlach. The men handcuffed Lönnrot. The latter at length recovered his voice.

"Scharlach, are you looking for the Secret Name?"

Scharlach remained standing, indifferent. He had not participated in the brief struggle, and he scarcely extended his hand to receive Lönnrot's revolver. He spoke; Lönnrot noted in his voice a fatigued triumph, a hatred the size of the universe, a sadness not less than that hatred.

"No," said Scharlach. "I am seeking something more ephemeral and perishable, I am seeking Erik Lönnrot. Three years ago, in a gambling house on the rue de Toulon, you arrested my brother and had him sent to jail. My men slipped me away in a coupé from the gun battle with a policeman's bullet in my stomach. Nine days and nine nights I lay in agony in this desolate, symmetrical villa; fever was demolishing me, and the odious two-faced Janus who watches the twilights and the dawns lent horror to my dreams and to my waking. I came to abominate my body, I came to sense that two eyes, two hands, two lungs are as monstrous as two faces. An Irishman tried to convert me to the faith of Jesus; he repeated to me the phrase of the *goyim:* All roads lead to Rome. At night my delirium nurtured itself on that metaphor; I felt that the world was a labyrinth, from which it was impossible to flee, for all roads, though they pretend to lead to the north or south, actually lead to Rome, which was also the quadrilateral jail where my brother was dying and the villa of Triste-le-Roy. On those nights I swore by the God who sees with two faces and by all the gods of fever and of the mirrors to weave a labyrinth around the man who had imprisoned my brother. I have woven it and it is firm: The ingredients are a dead heresiologist, a compass, an eighteenth-century sect, a Greek word, a dagger, the diamonds of a paint shop.

"The first term of the sequence was given to me by chance. I had planned with a few colleagues—among them Daniel Azevedo—the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

robbery of the Tetrarch's sapphires. Azevedo betrayed us: He got drunk with the money that we had advanced him and he undertook the job a day early. He got lost in the vastness of the hotel; around two in the morning he stumbled into Yarmolinsky's room. The latter, harassed by insomnia, had started to write. He was working on some notes, apparently, for an article on the Name of God; he had already written the words: *The first letter of the Name has been uttered.* Azevedo warned him to be silent; Yarmolinsky reached out his hand for the bell which would awaken the hotel's staff; Azevedo countered with a single stab in the chest. It was almost a reflex action; half a century of violence had taught him that the easiest and surest thing is to kill . . . Ten days later I learned through the *Yidische Zaitung* that you were seeking in Yarmolinsky's writings the key to his death. I read the *History of the Hasidic Sect;* I learned that the reverent fear of uttering the Name of God had given rise to the doctrine that that Name is all-powerful and recondite. I discovered that some Hasidim, in search of that secret Name, had gone so far as to perform human sacrifices . . . I knew that you would make the conjecture that the Hasidim had sacrificed the rabbi; I set myself the task of justifying that conjecture.

"Marcel Yarmolinsky died on the night of December third; for the second 'sacrifice' I selected the night of January third. He died in the north; for the second 'sacrifice' a place in the west was suitable. Daniel Azevedo was the necessary victim. He deserved death; he was impulsive, a traitor; his apprehension could destroy the entire plan. One of us stabbed him; in order to link his corpse to the other one I wrote on the paint-shop diamonds: *The second letter of the Name has been uttered.*

"The third murder was produced on the third of February. It was, as Treviranus guessed, a mere sham. I am Gryphius-Ginzberg-Ginsburg; I endured an interminable week (supplemented by a tenuous fake beard) in the perverse cubicle on the rue de Toulon, until my friends abducted me. From the footboard of the cab, one of them wrote on a post: *The last of the letters of the Name has been uttered.* That sentence revealed that the series of murders was *triple*. Thus the public understood it; I, nevertheless, interspersed repeated signs that would allow you, Erik Lönnrot, the reasoner, to understand that the series was quadruple. A portent in the north, others in the east and west, demand a fourth portent in the south; the Tetragrammaton—the name of God, JHVH—is made up of *four* letters; the harlequins and the paint-shop sign suggested *four* points. In the manual of Leusden I underlined a certain passage: That passage manifests that Hebrews compute the day from sunset to sunset; that passage makes known that the deaths occurred on the *fourth* of each month. I sent the equilateral triangle to Treviranus. I foresaw that you would add the missing point. The point which would form a perfect rhomb, the point which fixes in advance where

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a punctual death awaits you. I have premeditated everything, Erik Lönnrot, in order to attract you to the solitudes of Triste-le-Roy."

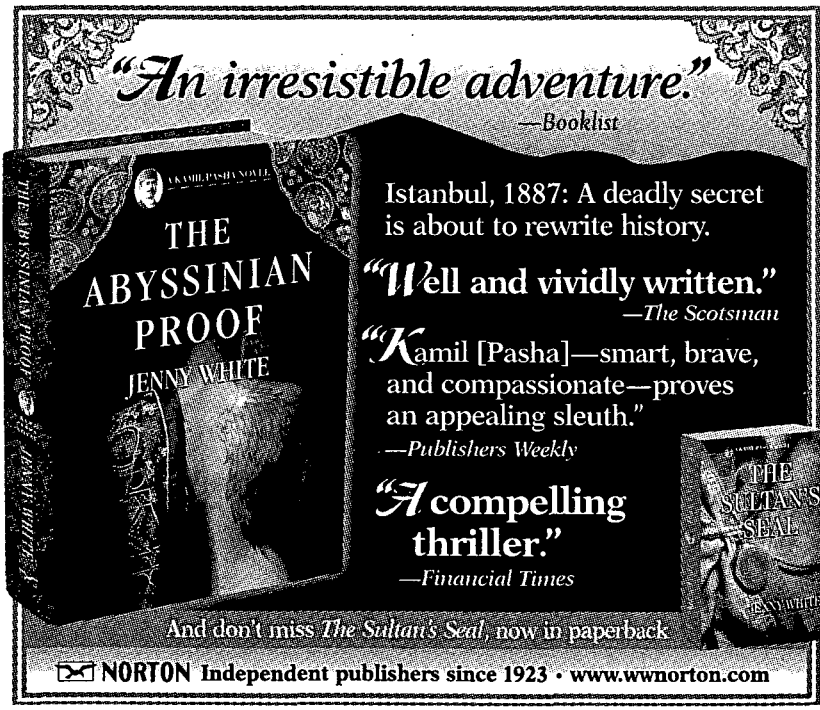
Lönnrot avoided Scharlach's eyes. He looked at the trees and the sky subdivided into diamonds of turbid yellow, green, and red. He felt faintly cold, and he felt, too, an impersonal—almost anonymous—sadness. It was already night; from the dusty garden came the futile cry of a bird. For the last time, Lönnrot considered the problem of the symmetrical and periodic deaths.

"In your labyrinth there are three lines too many," he said at last. "I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line. Along that line so many philosophers have lost themselves that a mere detective might well do so, too. Scharlach, when in some other incarnation you hunt me, pretend to commit (or do commit) a crime at A, then a second crime at B, eight kilometers from A, then a third crime at C, four kilometers from A and B, halfway between the two. Wait for me afterwards at D, two kilometers from A and C, again halfway between both. Kill me at D, as you are now going to kill me at Triste-le-Roy."

"The next time I kill you," replied Scharlach, "I promise you that labyrinth, consisting of a single line that is invisible and unceasing."

He moved back a few steps. Then, very carefully, he fired. ●

For Mandie Molina Vedia


"An irresistible adventure."
—Booklist
THE ABYSSINIAN PROOF
JENNY WHITE
Istanbul, 1887: A deadly secret is about to rewrite history.
"Well and vividly written."
—The Scotsman
"Kamil [Pasha]—smart, brave, and compassionate—proves an appealing sleuth."
—Publishers Weekly
"A compelling thriller."
—Financial Times
THE SULTAN'S SEAL
And don't miss The Sultan's Seal, now in paperback
NORTON Independent publishers since 1923 • www.wwnorton.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Bonnie and Clyde Caper

by O'Neil De Noux

"So, I hear you're a homicide detective," said the skinny deputy as he stepped up to my booth. "We don't get many killin's 'round here."

I put my coffee down. The deputy pulled up his gunbelt and smiled a crooked-toothed grin. His nameplate read "Scaddle," and he looked all of twenty-one, minimum age for a commissioned officer in Louisiana.

"Join me." I nodded to the bench-seat across the booth. We were in Parker's Goodtime Cafe in sunny Arcadia, along US 80 not far from Shreveport, in a part of Louisiana that actually had hills. Parker's was a 'forties-style diner, looking like an oversized silver torpedo with a row of booths along the windows and a counter and grill on the other side of the center aisle.

Policeman turned writer O'Neil DeNoux is the author of five novels, three collections of short stories, and many individual stories in genres ranging from Mystery to Western, Romance, and Science Fiction. He's known for his sometimes gritty realism, but this time out the New Orleans author provides a more light-hearted tale of his series cop John Raven Beau on vacation in the town where two of America's most famous criminals met their end. ‡

The khaki-clad deputy, who had a green and yellow Bienville Parish Sheriff's Office patch on his shoulder, sat and extended his right hand. "Glenn Scaddle. Two n's in Glenn and two d's in Scaddle." He was rail-thin, with reddish hair and deep-set brown eyes.

"John Raven Beau." We shook hands and I went back to my coffee.

"You really from New Orleans? You sound Cajun with that accent."

"My father was Cajun." I narrowed my light-brown eyes. "You

©2008 by O'Neil De Noux

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seem to know a lot about me, Mr. Scaddle."

He laughed like a donkey and waved to the lone waitress. "Some of that home brew, Peggy." Then turned back to me. "My daddy's Mr. Scaddle. I'm just plain Glenn. Myrtle at the hotel said a big-city cop's in town—good-lookin', she said, Mexican lookin'." He glanced around the cafe. "You fit the script." He seemed proud to have found me in a cafe with two other customers. "Your mother Mexican? No offense. Spanish are pretty people."

"She's Sioux." I was thinking this deputy was a freaking squirrel.

"Indian?"

"You know any other kind of Sioux?"

Again, the donkey laugh as Peggy the waitress brought his coffee. He took cream and three sugars. I folded my copy of the *Shreveport Times,* figuring Plain Glenn had more to say. Instead, he looked out the window for almost a minute before letting out a low whistle. I turned just as Gillie crossed the narrow street. The blue dress, which she'd laid out before jumping into the shower in our hotel room, was form-fitting. Not a mini dress, but short enough to show off those long, sleek legs. Her high heels and the tiny purse hanging from her left shoulder matched her dress perfectly. With her blond hair flowing in long waves as she strolled, lips painted dark red, eyes hidden behind wrap-around sunglasses, she looked as out of place in this small Louisiana town as Marisa Tomei in *My Cousin Vinny.*

"Holy moly," Plain Glenn mumbled, "you gotta love tourist season." He craned his neck to watch Gillie pass and asked, "So, what brings you to our little burg?"

"She did." I nodded toward Gillie as she stepped into the cafe and came over to slide into the booth next to me. She pulled off her sunglasses and gave me a peck on the lips.

"Sorry I kept you waiting," she said with a hint of mischief in those blue eyes. She always kept me waiting but the result was worth the wait.

"Gillian Rahmako. Meet Plain Glenn." We both looked at the deputy, who sat with his mouth half open in a silly grin. Gillie extended her hand for him to shake, then leaned back as Peggy stepped up. Gillie ordered coffee.

"Don't tell him," Gillie cautioned a confused Plain Glenn as she wrapped her arm around mine and said, "You won't guess what's going on here this weekend."

"You got me."

"Go ahead and guess." She elbowed me gently.

"All right. Cat rodeo? Shakespeare Festival?"

She poked my side.

"What? Louisiana's lousy with festivals."

Plain Glenn was trying to hide his honk-laugh as Peggy arrived with Gillie's coffee and freshened mine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gillie announced, "It's the Authentic Bonnie and Clyde Festival. They were shot just down the road."

I remembered they'd been killed in Louisiana, but I thought closer to Texas. Gillie looked as proud as Plain Glenn had when he'd found me.

"Is there an *Unauthentic* Bonnie and Clyde Festival?" I asked.

She playfully poked me again. "I'll bet Mr. Glenn here wouldn't mind escorting me around."

Plain Glenn spit up his coffee, toward the window thankfully. I passed him my napkin and he wiped his face as Gillie apologized and took a sip of her coffee, which was pretty good in Parker's Goodtime Cafe.

"I thought y'all *came* for the fest," Plain Glenn said nervously. "That's why so many people are in town."

So many people? Arcadia had a main street, about a dozen blocks long, and some side streets, but most of the places were boarded up. I'd seen few people.

"We actually came for the largest flea market in Louisiana." Gillie pulled a tourist map from her purse. That was Miss Gillian Ann Rahmako's passion, more than any passion I'd been able to raise in her. A law degree, in line for a junior partnership at a prestigious maritime law firm, owner of a two-story house just off St. Charles Avenue and a new BMW roadster, Gillie was happiest when browsing flea markets and antiques stores, going absolutely giddy over anything ancient, or at least old.

We'd exhausted the flea markets and antiques shops in and around New Orleans in the six months we'd been dating. She was thrilled when I took two weeks off to travel with her to Louisiana's largest flea market in Arcadia. I didn't have the heart to tell her I thought she was talking about *Acadiana*, where I'd been raised. Cajun country. But it was nice, being on the road with her, talking, snuggling in hotel rooms, leaving the sudden violence of home back home.

"You can follow the Bonnie and Clyde Trail," Plain Glenn was saying. "Got twenty points of interest." He nodded down the street. "They brought the bodies to Conger's Furniture Store. Had the autopsies there."

"In a furniture store?" I had to ask.

"It sold caskets. Doubled as a funeral home."

Made sense, I guessed.

"Parker's Goodtime Cafe." Gillie looked around. "Named for Bonnie Parker?"

"No. Judge Alcee Parker," said Plain Glenn. "No relation. He's the one who passed the law that women could wear pants in Louisiana?"

"Law?" Gillie and I said simultaneously.

"Yeah."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gillie gave me a you-gotta-be-kidding look.

"Before my time," Plain Glenn explained, "but before that law, women couldn't wear pants in Louisiana."

Whatever. What was the point of discussing it with someone who really believed that?

Peggy asked if we'd like refills and I shook my head. She turned to Plain Glenn. "Why aren't you out looking for my car? All I ask you to do is find one stolen car." She left in a huff.

I dropped a three-dollar tip and scooped up the check for three dollars, which I paid on the way out. I slipped on my dark Ray-Bans and noticed I stood a good eight inches taller than Plain Glenn. At six-two, I was a good half-foot taller than Gillie in her high heels.

Gillie slipped her sunglasses back on and asked our deputy, "Where is that furniture store slash funeral parlor?"

Plain Glenn looked a little embarrassed. "It was torn down after a tornado hit it back in 'ninety-two. Fools shoulda fixed it up. There's a vacant lot there. There's talk of turning it into a park."

Gillie laughed and wrapped her arm around Plain Glenn's right arm and her other around my left arm and said, "Well, let's go see the vacant lot."

"Well, whatever y'all do, y'all gotta see the reenactment of the shootout at three o'clock." Plain Glenn beamed. "Can't miss the crowd of cars leavin' town. Just follow the traffic."

We finally shed ourselves of Plain Glenn as we arrived at the largest outdoor flea market in Louisiana, which ran nine blocks on both sides of First Street, the main drag in Arcadia. I tagged along as Gillie went from table to table, examining lamps, jewelry, and books. By ten A.M., it was really hot, the sky void of clouds. Thankfully a warm breeze blew through town, cooling the sweat on the short-sleeved shirt I wore hanging out over my black T-shirt to hide my off-duty 9mm tucked into my belt at the small of my back. Gillie didn't sweat. Perspiration was a stranger to beautiful women.

Arcadia played the Bonnie and Clyde card to the max with side streets named Ambush Alley, Desperado Drive, and Barrow Boulevard, which was little more than an alley. But most of the storefronts were boarded up. Broken windows, jagged glass hanging from some, like vacant eyes staring blindly at the passing years. The lone filling station was defunct; the price listed for regular gas was ninety-seven cents.

Gillie bought a pair of vintage sunglasses, cat-eye style, the same color blue as her dress. She put them on immediately, retiring her wrap-arounds to her purse. I picked up an Elmore Leonard paperback I hadn't read.

Okay, north Louisiana wasn't my idea of a vacation spot, but the long drive with Gillie, getting away from New Orleans and the con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stant pressure-cooker of homicide work, relaxed me. But I could never turn off the cop in me. I spotted a pickpocket at the flea market. Unshaven, with oily black hair, a good three inches taller than me, skinnier than Plain Glenn, and wearing a blindingly orange sport coat over dirty jeans and ratty running shoes, he tried his best to blend into the crowd. There were dozens of people in town by that time, but he blended as easily as a giraffe at a dog show.

Gillie did a double-take. "What's with the unnecessary orange jacket? Kind of warm for wool, wouldn't you say?"

"Exactly."

Orange Man checked out several men at a table of vintage magazines, sidling up to a man in a lime-green shirt and baggy shorts, bumping into him and neatly extracting the man's wallet from a rear pocket. He turned, took two steps, and bumped into me. Pretending to swing around him, I grabbed the lapels of his jacket and kicked his feet out from under him, landing on his chest with my knees, my 9mm pressed against his jaw.

His eyes met mine and I smiled coldly. "Don't move."

Standing in front of us, Gillie turned and called out, "Plain Glenn!" She only had to call once and I heard the jiggling of keys and the slap of the deputy's holster as he raced up. Hadn't realized he wore cowboy boots.

"What happened?" Plain Glenn reached for his revolver, but hesitated, thankfully.

I slid my weapon back into my belt. "Handcuffs."

Plain Glenn fumbled out his cuffs and passed them to me. I rolled Orange Man over, cuffed him behind his back, and patted him down, coming up with three wallets but no weapons. I pulled the man up and turned him to face me before saying, "You're supposed to keep the money and throw the wallets away, moron." Spotting the man with the lime-green shirt, I held up the wallets. "Which one's yours?"

Painted canary yellow, Cole's Pharmacy was the only bright building in Arcadia. It occupied the entire first floor of a raised Victorian at the corner of Barrow Boulevard and Ford Deluxe Avenue.

"Bet ya they were shot in a Ford Deluxe," Gillie said as I opened the door for her. One step inside and we stopped immediately. I'm not sure what a turn-of-the-century pharmacy is supposed to look like, but we stood there a minute to take it all in. It seemed like a movie set: pristine hardwood floors, white shelving with pharmaceuticals on the right, on the left a marble counter with a soda fountain, manned by a tall gentleman in all white, including his hair and full moustache turned up on the ends. He nodded to us.

There was even a wooden Indian just inside the doorway. Couldn't be Sioux, wearing a thick buckskin shirt and long buckskin pants. The face wasn't lean either, like a plains warrior. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flat and looked exotic, more like a Mexican. Pretty people, right?

Gillie breezed over to the counter, took off her sunglasses, and asked the man, "Could I get a cherry phosphate?"

"You sure can." He didn't smile exactly, but the chiseled face softened as Gillie climbed up on a stool.

"Make it two," she said, patting the stool next to her. I took the hint as she asked the man, "You Mr. Cole?"

"Actually, I am. Pharmacist, cashier, soda-fountain jerk. I sweep the place, too."

I sat and watched him fill two glasses with fizzy water, pour in some red syrup, mix them, then add shaved ice before bringing them to us with two straws. Gillie took a sip and laughed. "Good as where I grew up."

"Where's that?" Cole asked, wiping the marble counter with a white dishtowel.

"Manhattan, Kansas." She took another sip. "So, what's good for lunch here?"

Cole passed us two plastic-coated menus. "Sandwiches and salads only. The BLT is my specialty. Cooked the bacon a short while ago, still warm in the rotisserie."

Gillie ordered the Caesar salad and I ordered Cole's special BLT, both of us sipping our phosphates and watching the elderly man fix our food with an economy of motion. We finished the sweet-tangy drinks at the same time. I'd never tasted a soft drink like it. Back home, Barq's Red Drink was much sweeter.

I felt Gillie's hand on my arm as she said, "You know what I'm thinking?"

I started chuckling.

"What's so funny?"

"If *any* man could tell what a woman's thinking, it would be a miracle."

She poked my chest with a bony knuckle. "Your brain's too slow."

I grinned. "I knew it was something like that."

She put an elbow up on the counter, cupped her chin in the palm of her hand, and said, "I was thinking about your knee. I checked up on you."

I was right. I never would have figured what she was thinking.

"All-state quarterback in high school. Full scholarship to LSU. *Sports Today* called you the top prospect in the South, rocket arm, the best running-quarterback in a decade. No wonder you moved so fast with that pickpocket, had him down in a heartbeat."

She gave me a serious look. "I found an article about your knee, too. You never explained the scars on your knee. That why you didn't finish at LSU?"

"That and my slow brain."

She poked me again.

Mr. Cole arrived with our meals and left them with fresh cherry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phosphates. He'd fixed the BLT on a toasted roll, crisp bacon, crisper lettuce, chilled tomatoes, light mayonnaise, and a touch of mustard. As I took the second bite of the best BLT I'd ever tasted two people rushed into Cole's. A man in a lightweight tan suit and a blond woman in a pink dress shuffled up to us and introduced themselves as Bill Sutherland, who'd played Clyde Barrow in the shootout for ten years before moving on to become the festival's manager, and Casey Quail, who used to play Bonnie Parker.

Sutherland was about five-six, with slicked-back hair and a pencil-thin moustache. Quail, a pretty woman with green eyes, announced she'd put on too much weight to play Bonnie and was now the festival's public-relations coordinator. She wasn't heavy at all, but I learned long ago that most women thought they were too heavy. Both looked about forty.

"Just wanted to shake your hand," Sutherland said. "Catching that pickpocket was boss. Really boss." I held up my BLT in lieu of shaking his hand.

"He could have been spotted from the space shuttle," Gillie said with a twist of her head, flipping her hair aside, "in that jacket."

Sutherland laughed a little too loud. They sat at the counter on either side of us. The woman wore too much perfume, sweet, flowery, like the strong stuff worn by my Cajun aunts. Sutherland continued his congratulating, telling us we showed the tourists crime didn't pay in Arcadia. "That gun you carry, you're some kinda cop, right? Federal?"

"NOPD."

"Huh."

I noticed the two women communicating with their eyes past me, exchanging glances that, I'm sure, said a lot, but were completely indecipherable to me. The exchange didn't look friendly.

"Y'all can't miss the shootout at three," Sutherland was saying. "It's the highlight of the fest."

I nodded as I finished my BLT and noticed Gillie had put away a lot of her salad. She was a sneaky eater, little bites, but she got it all down. I, on the other hand, ate like a cop. Fast and furiously because you never knew when you'd get called away from a lunch break to stop a crime or protect the public—from the public.

Mr. Cole brought us the check and Gillie snatched it up because I'd been paying for everything. She put down a credit card and Mr. Cole told her no credit cards, no checks. Cash only. I passed him a twenty before she could dig out any bills from her purse and told him that was the best BLT I ever had.

"You don't tip me. I'm the owner."

"I'm not tipping the owner." I stood and backed away from the counter. "I'm tipping the guy who served us."

Quail stepped away with me, as I tried to let Gillie finish her salad in peace, but Sutherland stayed with her. She politely lis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tened to his jabbering. Quail accidentally brushed against me, then backed off with a coy blush on her face. Jesus!

"Did you see the wooden Indian?" she asked.

I told her no and she directed me to it, telling me it was one of those Indians from *The Last of the Mohicans.* Not the book, but the movie with Daniel Day-Lewis.

"Weren't those Hurons, Ottawa, Mohawks? Mostly bald or with, you know, Mohawks?"

"I guess." She shrugged as we arrived at the Indian. Sutherland came over with a disposable camera and asked me to pose with Quail and the Indian. I looked back at Gillie for help but she just waved.

Eventually, we left Cole's, back into the bright sun and the thick humidity. Gillie looked back inside. "What a great place."

Sutherland glanced back at the pharmacy. "Cole's a weird duck. Only taking cash."

Quail seemed annoyed at him, glanced at her watch, and declared, "We have to be off."

Sutherland shook my hand and said, "Our deputy can lead you to the shootout, show you the way."

Quail batted her eyes and gave my hand a secret squeeze before leaving with Sutherland.

Gillie and I headed back to the flea market and ran right into Plain Glenn. "Y'all come from Cole's?"

Gillie told him she thought it was such a cool place.

"The old skinflint only takes cash," said Plain Glenn. "Keeps it all in a big safe in back. Bought it from the bank when it went belly up. Had to tear the back of his place down and rebuild it around the safe. Y'all can ride with me to the shootout. It'll be crowded by the monument."

Gillie said, "That's all right. I'll drive." We started walking again and she asked, "What model of car were Bonnie and Clyde killed in?"

The crooked-toothed grin was back. "A nineteen thirty-four Ford Deluxe, V-8. You should see it. A hundred and sixty bullets in it."

"Ford Deluxe." Gillie gave me a knowing smirk. "Is the car here in Arcadia?"

Plain Glenn let out a long breath. "No. Las Vegas. But I saw it once."

We passed the Bonnie & Clyde RV Trailer Park with its huge sign, a silhouette of the bandit couple, holes in their torsos. The park looked crowded. Gillie tooled her roadster down LA 154, a narrow, blacktopped two-lane road which probably hadn't changed much since that fateful day back in 1934. We hit the traffic just outside Gibsland, which was closer to the site of the shooting, both burgs nestled between long stretches of piney woods. The site of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shooting was about seven miles south of Gibsland, the last town Bonnie and Clyde visited, according to the brochures we picked up at the flea market.

Bienville Parish sheriff's deputies, including a dark-haired sergeant and Plain Glenn, directed traffic as cars parked on either side of the road. The sergeant flagged us down and told us to go back and park alongside the road heading back toward Gibsland because they had to clear an area by the monument for the reenactment.

Gillie U-turned and we parked and walked back. It was then I saw a line of rain clouds in the west, dark gray and menacing and heading our way. By the time we eased through the crowd at the monument, I could smell the rain, stronger than the scent of pine. Families were taking turns posing next to the monument, a chipped granite marker, some of the lettering hard to read.

"Are those bullet holes?" Gillie asked, pulling my hand as we crossed the road.

"Probably. Perfect target."

"At this site," Gillie read aloud from the engraving, "May twenty-third, nineteen thirty-four, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker were killed by law enforcement officials. Erected by Bienville Parish Police Jury."

I spotted Myrtle, the one who knew all about me from the hotel, standing with Mr. Cole. She nodded but he didn't seem to notice us. Several of the vendors from the flea market were there too and a lot of kids. Hell, this was clean American fun. A shootout.

A voice over a bullhorn blared, "All right, everyone." It was Plain Glenn. "Everyone has to retreat beyond where the police cars are parked for the reenactment."

We followed the crowd back across the road and eased toward our car as the sky darkened. Lightning flashed in the distance, followed a few seconds later by a roll of thunder. The crowd looked big now.

"Where's our festival manager and his plump public-relations coordinator?" Gillie said.

"She's not that plump." I looked around but couldn't spot Sutherland or Quail.

"Without that girdle, I'll bet she has quite a belly."

The bullhorn crackled again. "Here they come!"

We all looked down the road as a black car slowly approached. It looked more like a Model-T to me than a Ford Deluxe, not that I knew what a Deluxe looked like, expect it was probably bigger. A movement to my left caught my eye as six men carrying rifles and Thompson submachine guns with round carriages protruding from the bottom, like gangsters from a Cagney movie, came out of the woods and leveled their guns at the approaching car.

Gillie said, "Didn't even ask them to surrender."

The first gun went off, its loud report causing everyone to flinch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The car swerved, the lawmen opened up, the fusillade so loud I felt it in my teeth. As the gunfire slackened, I heard a couple of kids crying from the loud noise and noticed holes in the car.

"I didn't see any of those little explosions in the car, like in the movie," Gillie said.

The car's windows were shattered, the holes probably there all along. The air reeked of cordite and burned gunpowder. As the car came to a creeping stop, just this side of the monument, the passenger door fell open and we saw the red-headed faux-Bonnie slumped in the seat. Clyde jumped out of the car and swung his own Tommy gun toward the lawmen, who opened up again. He shimmied and dropped the gun and fell on his back.

Two of the lawmen closed in, firing at both corpses until they were out of ammo. The actors convulsed as if struck by bullets. As the coppers checked the bodies, a fat drop of rain fell in the roadway a few feet from us. Gillie immediately dug her keys out of her purse and we headed for the car. We just got in when the rain hit, as if God had turned on a fire hose, washing across the window in waves. Thunder slammed outside and forked lightning danced above as Gillie eased onto the blacktop and tooled us right out of there. We left the storm by the time we reached Gibsland, but the sky behind us was charcoal gray.

"Tornado weather," Gillie said, a catch in her voice. She would know, being from Kansas.

"Ever see one?"

"Up close and personal." She told me how a big twister had caught her family on the open road, how her father pulled their pickup under a train trestle, and how they hid under the trestle as the twister skipped by.

"It didn't come any closer than a football field, but it nearly yanked me and my little sister away." She looked pale, then shrugged. "Didn't mean to get all maudlin."

I reached around to rub her neck gently. "Maudlin? Why not? You just saw the most famous couple around here get slaughtered."

She giggled nervously. A few minutes later, I looked back and saw that the sky wasn't as dark behind us as we pulled into Arcadia. The storm was headed north. Gillie braked hard, turning me around. In the center of the road stood Peggy in her aqua waitress outfit. Face red, panting as if she'd run a mile, she came to my side of the car as I rolled the window down.

"Where's . . . Deputy . . . Scaddle?" She wheezed.

"What's wrong?"

"My stolen . . . car." She sucked in a deep breath and pointed up the street. "Parked . . . behind Cole's."

"We'll check it out." I'd have let her in if we weren't in a two-seater.

She nodded and backed away, pointing in the direction of Barrow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Boulevard. We were there in a minute. Gillie turned on Ford Deluxe, pulling into the parking lot behind Cole's, where we saw a baby-blue Ford Taurus with a red fender. I got out before Gillie turned off the engine, and for the second time that day, drew my weapon. A screwdriver protruded from the shattered starter housing. I smelled something, took another whiff. Perfume. A strong, familiar scent. Then I smelled smoke.

"It's coming from Cole's!" Gillie pointed to smoke slithering from the back door of the pharmacy.

As we started for the door, it slammed open and two figures in yellow plastic suits stumbled out onto the back porch. Wearing hoods with faceplates and gloves, they looked like spacemen from a bad science-fiction movie. I raised my weapon as one yanked off its hood and slapped the other with it. It was Quail, and she wailed at the other figure, "Idiot! You set the money on fire."

Sutherland pulled his mask off and staggered across the porch. He gasped, "Damn thing doesn't work!"

"It's not a gas mask, you nincompoop," Quail yelled and then saw us and froze. She pointed at Sutherland. "He set the money on fire."

"Down on your stomachs," I told them, aiming my weapon at each, back and forth, until they complied. Gillie tiptoed past both and peeked into Cole's. Then she went in.

I moved between my two prisoners and shouted to Gillie, "Is it bad in there?"

"No! Just inside the safe."

I told Quail and Sutherland to stop wiggling. Sutherland coughed again. I heard two coughs inside and then a loud clang.

"You all right?"

Gillie bounced into the doorway and smiled. "Yeah. I shut the safe. No oxygen, the fire should go out." She folded her arms and looked at our prisoners. "There's an acetylene torch on the floor. It opened the safe all right."

"How?" Sutherland coughed again. "How'd you know?"

"The smoke, you moron!" Quail sat up and tried to kick him, only he was too far away. "He burned the money!"

"Lie back down," I growled, then leaned over and searched Sutherland. I asked Gillie to frisk Quail.

"Like hell she will." Quail sat up again.

"Either she does or I do," I said and immediately knew that was a mistake.

"*You* can." There was a flirtatious lilt to her angry voice.

I nodded to Gillie, who put a foot on Quail's back, shoved her down, and frisked her. Rushing footsteps turned me in time to see Plain Glenn and the Bienville sergeant lope into the rear parking area of Cole's, both with guns out. I put mine away immediately. Before I could say a word, Peggy and Myrtle (Lord knows where she came from) intercepted the rushing cops.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For the next couple of minutes, Peggy and Myrtle lit into Plain Glenn and the sergeant about the stolen car, about rampant crime in Arcadia, about Plain Glenn not even knowing how to tip a waitress, about the upcoming election, and about how they planned to vote the sheriff out of office if these were the best he could come up with as deputies.

"Why steal my car?" Peggy moaned. "They ruined the steering column."

It was Gillie who ran out of patience first. "They stole it as a getaway car. To drive to where they stashed their car."

Peggy and Myrtle looked at us as the cops took the opportunity to join us on the porch.

"What's that smoke?" asked the sergeant, whose nametag read "LeBeau." Gillie explained. I helped Plain Glenn handcuff the two desperadoes and stand them up.

A maroon car that looked like a vintage Rolls Royce came into the parking area. Cole was behind the wheel and I saw it wasn't a Rolls at all. The car had a heart-shaped grille, flared fenders, and split front bumpers.

Cole climbed out and stood there a few seconds. I started to tell him about the break-in when Plain Glenn interrupted, "Looks like they went in that back window. Put an acetylene torch to your bank safe. They went out of their way to suggest that Officer Beau here, he's a New Orleans detective, go to the reenactment so none of us cops would be around. Even stole a car as a getaway." He pointed to Peggy's Taurus. "Screwdriver to the steering column."

I glanced at Gillie, who was looking around for the window he'd mentioned. We spotted it at the far end of the building, away from all the action. Plain Glenn's vision was very good, even when he wasn't checking out my girlfriend.

Cole stepped up on the porch and growled, "It's not a bank safe. Just a walk-in safe. No time lock."

"I'm afraid all the contents of your safe got burned," Gillie told Cole. He turned to the two in the yellow jumpsuits with a cold glare.

"You see what was inside before you torched it?" he asked.

Sutherland looked away. Quail said no.

"Only money in there was yesterday's receipts and that's insured," Cole said, looking at Plain Glenn now. "I'm not idiotic enough to keep all my money in a safe in my store. That why we got banks in Shreveport."

The good deputy couldn't mask his surprise as he pulled up his gunbelt and said that was good, smart, the way to go. He turned to me and I said it was boss. "Really boss."

Cole went inside to check it out as LeBeau took Sutherland by the arm, letting Plain Glenn take Quail's elbow as they led them away. Gillie started toward the window used to enter Cole's and I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

followed. The screen was on the ground, the window jimmied from the outside.

"How do you suppose they knew Cole didn't have an alarm?" Gillie narrowed those blue eyes at me. I took a closer look at the window. There were no alarm strips, but that meant nothing these days with motion detectors and alarms triggered by sound.

"Come on," I said, taking her hand.

"Where are we going?"

"Police station."

It wasn't much of a police station, a single-story, cinderblock building along Ambush Alley, just off First Street. Crammed inside the office were LeBeau, Plain Glenn, Myrtle, Peggy, and three men I recognized as operators of the flea market. I could see into the two cells and they were empty.

"What happened to Tweedle-dumb and Tweedle-dumber?" Gillie asked as the men made way for us.

LeBeau waved to two doors behind him. "Locked in the interview rooms. We're letting them simmer."

I eased over to LeBeau and said, "I think we should talk with Quail first."

"Who?" He smelled of Old Spice and faintly of cigar smoke.

"The woman."

He nodded. "What's your name again?"

I pulled out my credentials.

"Beau? Cajun, huh?"

"Born and raised on Vermilion Bay."

He stuck out his hand. "I'm from St. Martinville." Evangeline country. Couldn't get more Cajun than that. He eased toward the first interview room and said, "Let's talk to the woman."

Casey Quail was climbing out of her yellow spacesuit as we came in. She wore a T-shirt and shorts underneath, both gray, both sweat-stained. The small room reeked of her perfume and perspiration. No girdle and she's wasn't plump. Solid, but not plump and no big belly. Had to remember to tell Gillie that. LeBeau took the only chair and let Quail stand, her back against the wall, while I stood against the door.

Red-faced, she looked at me, then LeBeau, as he casually took out his ID folder, withdrew a Miranda card, and read her rights aloud. She watched me and I stared back, unemotional and dead-serious. She tried a quivering smile, then exhaled deeply. She rolled her shoulders and her breasts. LeBeau finished and looked at me. I kept my expressionless, unblinking stare on Quail for a full minute. She let out another sigh.

"So?" she said. "It was a practical joke."

"Try again." The look I gave her came naturally. A plains warrior never revealed emotion in battle, except to war-whoop, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wasn't called for here. No way I could just throw back my head and go, "Hi-yaa! Hi-yaa!" No, this called for the stone-serious stare.

"It was Sutherland's fault. All of it." She folded her arms in a defensive position.

"Yeah?" I said.

"He talked me into it. He can be very persuasive."

Since she gave me an opening, I took it. "As persuasive as he'll probably be with the D.A., putting it all on you. You know the story, Eve tempting Adam with the apple in the Garden of Eden." Jesus, I couldn't believe I'd said that. But it worked.

She teared up and I knew we were almost there. I leaned closer and let a sympathetic smile crawl across my lips before saying, "It wasn't all Sutherland's idea, was it?"

She wiped the tears from her eyes and said, "Huh?"

"It wasn't yours either. It was Scaddle, wasn't it?"

She looked at LeBeau, who looked as surprised as she, then turned back to me and I told her, "I'm a detective, Casey. That's why Scaddle sought me out, was so determined for me to see the reenactment. He mentioned it before Sutherland. Last thing he wanted was someone like me in town."

She leaned back against the wall, hands by her sides now, and said, "How'd you know?"

LeBeau produced a cassette recorder and we took her statement. Then we stepped out to put Casey Quail into one of the cells and found Mr. Cole explaining to Gillie that his car was a Brewster, 1936 model, built on a Rolls Royce chassis. Rolls owned Brewster.

Deputy Plain Glenn Scaddle was leaning against the only desk in the place.

"Ramko," Plain Glenn interrupted Cole, "what kinda name is that?"

"Rahmako," Gillie corrected him. "It's Finnish."

"Huh?" Plain Glenn noticed me and LeBeau and leaned away from my girlfriend.

"From Finland."

"Oh," he said and I could see he had no clue. Louisiana schools weren't strong on geography.

"I'm a Scot," Plain Glenn said, tugging up his gunbelt. "From Scotland. Long time ago."

I moved to pass him, unsnapped his holster and palmed his weapon before he could react. I handed it, butt first, to LeBeau. Plain Glenn slapped his holster a moment too late.

"You wanna pull a gun on me?" Over my shoulder, I told LeBeau, "Give it back to him." My hand eased around to my weapon. Plain Glenn raised both hands and tried to chuckle.

"Whoa, cowboy. What's goin' on?"

I put a hand on his shoulder and stared into his eyes. "We're going into that little room and you're going to tell Sergeant LeBeau and me all about it." I squeezed his shoulder until he winced. "Don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insult our intelligence with a cock-and-bull story. And never call me a cowboy again. I'm Sioux."

LeBeau took him into the room. Gillie grabbed my hand as I started to follow. "Plain Glenn isn't so plain, is he?"

"Nope," I told her.

"He knows too much, bragging how it all went down, how the window was jimmied. How Peggy's car had the broken steering column and he never went near the car." She pointed her chin at me. "How could he see the window jimmied from the porch?"

"How'd he know they used an acetylene torch?"

I brush-kissed her lips and told her I'd be a few minutes.

Deputy Scaddle, looking much younger than twenty-one, more like an errant teenager, confessed almost immediately. All it took was for me to say he was pretty smart about it all, nearly pulled off the caper of the century in Arcadia. How was he to know Cole didn't keep his money in there and that Sutherland didn't know squat about using an acetylene? I didn't mention how would he know someone like me would be in town.

"Clyde Barrow would have been proud of you," I added. "You almost made it."

Again the crooked-toothed grin. The fool appeared pleased with himself. LeBeau took his confession before booking all three. Gillie was wired, bouncing as we walked out of the jail.

"You all right?"

"I will be, soon as we get to the room."

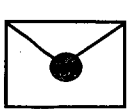
I almost asked what she meant, but caught myself. It was there in her eyes. The firelight of lust hovered in those baby blues. She squeezed my hand and walked faster, towing me toward the hotel. It was definitely time to turn on my French side.

After, as we lay in bed, the ceiling fan cooling us, Gillie wouldn't stop talking. Not about us or about Bonnie and Clyde or even the caper. She kept talking about the maroon Brewster and Cole's marble counter and soda fountain and the old man's handlebar moustache. She sure liked old things.

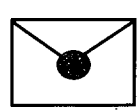
For a moment, I wondered if I'd be catching a bus back to New Orleans. ●

CUSTOMER SERVICE OR SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE

Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to:



ELLERY QUEEN
6 Prowitt Street
Norwalk, CT 06855



For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving.
Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BLOG BYTES

by Bill Crider

Paul Bishop is a thirty-year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department. At the moment, he's the Commanding Officer of the Operations-West Bureau's Sexual Assault Detail and the author of a number of fine novels, including *Chapel of the Ravens* and *Chalk Whispers,* as well as a number of scripts for film and television. His blog, *Bish's Beat* **(http://bishsbeat.blogspot.com)**, is devoted to "eclectic meanderings on books, music, the Rat Pack, the lounge life, '60s spy-movie series, and anything else of mild amusement." I always enjoy Bishop's reviews of books, movies, and music, and he updates his blog regularly.

Another blogging cop is Lee Lofland, author of *Police Procedure and Investigation: A Guide For Writers.* He calls his blog *The Graveyard Shift* **(http://www.leelofland.com/wordpress)**, and it's full of items of interest to both readers and writers of crime fiction, with topics like "How Detectives Know when a Suspect is Lying," "Blood Evidence," and "The Day I Killed the Bank Robber." The blog is profusely illustrated with photos and drawings. Great stuff.

Inspector Queen is a fictional cop, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention an excellent Web site devoted to him and his son, Ellery **(http://neptune.spaceports.com/~queen/Whodunit_1.html)**. I advise you to have plenty of spare time before you start exploring this site because there's a lot there, and it's the kind of place where you can spend days browsing through discussions of the novels and stories, biographies of Queen's creators, Manfred B. Lee and Frederic Dannay, articles on Queen himself, and much, much more. Check it out.

Susan Wittig Albert isn't a cop, but she's the author of the popular China Bayles series as well as a very entertaining series that features Beatrix Potter. Albert's blog is *Lifescapes* **(http://susanalbert.typepad.com/lifescapes)**, and she often has photos of the flowers and plants around her Texas Hill Country residence. Spring brought photos of bluebonnets and mountain laurel, among others. There are discussions of gardening and herbs, along with lots of links for those interested in exploring those topics further.

Moving from herbs to cats, we have Clea Simon's *Cats & Crime & Rock & Roll* **(http://cleasimon.blogspot.com)**. The title alone makes this one irresistible. Simon's latest book is *Cries and Whiskers*, and her blog is devoted to exactly what the title says it is. She adds, "What more do you need to know?" What, indeed? Actually, the blog does venture into other topics. Take a look for yourself.

©2008 by Bill Crider

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

SHOOTING THE MOON

by Thomas Humphrey

I was well into my fourth Absolut martini when I explained to my best friend Reggie Bemus and the other regulars having a few belts after work how I'd like to kill Martin Puckett. It was the kind of thing you say when you're half in the bag—griping about somebody doing something you can't do anything about. I didn't expect that within twenty-four hours of my saying it, Martin Puckett would be dead.

Boise, Idaho, attorney Thomas Humphrey was a civil litigator for twelve years before starting his own business and beginning to write in his spare time. This first short story is not only his first published work but his very first effort. He is currently at work on a thriller set in the legal world.

Puckett, like Reggie and me, was a lawyer, but whereas I was a business lawyer specializing in mergers and acquisitions, and Reggie was probably the finest criminal defense attorney in the state, Martin Puckett was a divorce lawyer. He was the low-rent kind, a bottom feeder—graduated last in his class at some obscure unaccredited law school out of Oklahoma or Arkansas, flunked the bar three times, and had twice been disciplined by Bar Counsel for intimidating a witness. He was, nevertheless, wildly successful.

And Martin Puckett was my wife's lawyer.

Part of my bitterness came from not having seen it coming. Wendy and I had been married for all of eight years. We had twin seven-year-old girls, Susan and Samantha. I was a good provider for our family, a partner at a mid-sized AV-rated law firm, Moffatt, Bemus, Snow & Harris. I read to my kids, spent time with them, taking them to Disneyland the last two summers. I mowed the lawn. I never hit my wife, never cheated on her, and usually remembered our anniversary.

Nevertheless, on the Friday afternoon before the Labor Day

©2008 by Thomas Humphrey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

weekend, a snot-faced kid cornered me in the elevator, serving me a stack of documents. Before I even realized what was in my hands, he jumped off at the next floor.

He had good reason to run. The documents consisted of the divorce complaint, the first set of interrogatories and requests for production of documents, a temporary restraining order freezing the transfer of all community assets, and a temporary custody order allowing me to see my children on alternating weekends and on Wednesday evenings from six until nine.

Less than an hour later, Wendy called me while I was still staring blankly out my office window, to tell me that my clothes, my golf clubs, and my toothbrush had been packed and delivered to the room reserved for me at the Marriott Residence Inn. She explained that it was a good place, that she specifically chose the Marriott because their monthly rates were so reasonable. Even better, she said, it was right next to Riverside Park, where I could take the kids to feed the ducks—on my weekends.

I asked my wife why it was necessary to eject me from my house *without warning or provocation.* She replied, "Marty thought it best." I didn't know she even knew Martin Puckett, let alone how well.

In fact, that was the insult to injury part of the equation. No sooner had my wife kicked me out of the house than the rumors started circulating through our incestuous local bar association that Puckett wasn't just representing my wife in our divorce but that he had also become an attorney with privileges. This kind of gossip was frequent with Puckett, that's what he did, but Wendy neither discouraged the rumors nor denied their truth when I asked her.

Deal with it, Reggie said. Yeah, right.

Two months after the divorce was filed, I was sitting on a barstool at the Tenth Street Saloon, a sports bar and downtown watering hole. It served stiff drinks, decent bar food, and ran ESPN on various television sets scattered around its perimeter. With its dim lights and large crowd of regular anonymous drinkers, it was a good place to hide. Reggie and I were getting lit with a couple of the other regulars, Kiplinger, a personal-injury lawyer, and Caruthers, a proctologist who came downtown to do his drinking.

I was telling the boys how I'd do it. "All you gotta do is lead him a little bit," I said, taking an imaginary revolver in hand and aiming it at an imaginary Puckett on the other end of the horseshoe bar.

"Give it a rest, Bruce," Reggie said. Even after a day's work and a few drinks, Reggie was the kind of guy who always looked well-pressed, tie cinched up, slick black hair in perfect place, not one ounce of fat on his torso, all to further his image to the public. Reggie was our firm's star litigator and needed every penny he made from it, what with alimony and support for children issued from three different marriages. Given that Puckett had represented all three of Reggie's ex-wives in successive divorces, each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one messier than the last, one would have thought that he'd have seconded my grudge. Recently, Reggie had announced that he was getting married again, a fourth time—to his secretary, naturally. Oddly enough, Puckett was the first to congratulate him.

"Somebody needs to take him out," I said, not done yet. "I'd cap him as he's coming down the courthouse steps. People in the street would stop, gimme a round of applause." My indignation felt righteous. A year ago I had everything, a wife, kids, a place I called home. Now, my nightly dinner was bar Hot Wings and my front lawn was a parking lot.

Kiplinger, sitting on the other side of Reggie, wasn't buying it either. "Harris, do you even *own* a gun?" Kiplinger didn't like Puckett any more than Reggie or I did. After Puckett tagged him twice in five years, Kip said that instead of getting married again, he was just going to find a woman he already hated and buy *her* a house.

"I'll get one," I said.

"Why not use a weapon you're more adept at, maybe a three wood?" This came from Caruthers, the proctologist, two past divorces, one pending—all Puckett.

"No, I'd think that shot would call for an iron," Kiplinger said.

"I like that idea," I said. "I'd cram my driver down that SOB's throat so hard that Caruthers could then pull it out his—"

"Would you *gentlemen* like another round?" Jenna, the bartender, said. She was used to this nightly discussion group by now, knew when to see if we wanted more alcohol.

We did.

By the time Jenna had brought around another martini for me, another Glenmorangie for Reggie, and whatever the other two were drinking, the topic had moved on to other things we couldn't do a damn thing about—global warming, the Middle East, whatever. Reggie didn't even touch his drink but I had several more. By the time I was ready to leave, Reggie was sober enough to drive me back to Chez Marriott and help me to my room. The whole episode would have undoubtedly been forgotten but for what was to happen later that morning.

At approximately 3:30 A.M., a time estimated by our county medical examiner, someone wrapped a three-iron around Martin Puckett's head, killing him instantly as he had opened the front door to his townhouse in bathrobe and slippers. It was *my* three-iron.

It took about a week and a half for the detectives to piece it all together. After canvassing all of Puckett's conceivable enemies, and there were a lot of them, two detectives named Lasker and Dunn eventually got around to interrogating me. They eventually also got around to questioning someone who told them about my so-called threats at the bar. That led to them securing a warrant so they could see if there was a golf club missing from my bag.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What happened next was like something out of *Law and Order*. The two of them confronted me in the same office elevator that the process server had found me in, made a couple of wise comments, cuffed me, and took me to the station. Since I'd demanded to see my lawyer, they dropped me in a holding cell, Lasker telling me that I'd picked a good day to get arrested; the jail was having cheeseburgers and tots for lunch.

Three hours later, Reggie met me in the attorney visiting chamber, the one with the wire mesh and glass windows and jailhouse telephones. "You haven't given me a whole lot to work with," Reggie said, dressed impeccably, as always, in a Brioni suit and with a conservative blue tie displaying a white nautical design just below the knot.

"I hadn't planned on getting arrested," I said, dressed in an orange jumpsuit, sitting on a cold metal stool bolted to the floor.

Reggie skimmed through the police report, raising his eyebrows as he read aloud, "You had motive. You expressed that motive publicly. You had opportunity. Your golf club was found at the scene." He let out a sigh and kept reading. "There were no fingerprints on it, however. That's good. You would have thought that if you were stupid enough to leave the murder weapon there in the first place, you wouldn't have bothered to wipe the prints clean."

"What have the cops said about Puckett and Wendy?" I said.

"Not a word. They may not even know about it—and since they have the murder weapon, they aren't going to do much more of an investigation, either."

He was right. Putting it that way, however, didn't make me feel much better. "What do you propose we do?" I said.

"I think we just have to make it look like you were framed and see if we can pull one over on the jury."

"*Pull one over on the jury?*" I said, getting indignant now. "*I* was *framed.*" There were only two people who could have done it, of course, Kiplinger or Caruthers, the two guys at the bar who heard me spouting off. I said we needed to pursue them.

Reggie disagreed, shaking his head. "Not necessarily. Anybody you played golf with the past month could have swiped that club. The fact that you talked about using one on Puckett's head is probably just . . . an unhappy coincidence." He was scribbling something on his yellow legal pad. "Don't worry, I'll think of something."

"*That's it?* You'll think of something?"

"I always do."

This didn't comfort me much. Reggie's high opinion of himself was sincere, however—maybe even justified. Reggie *was* good. He made a national name for himself a few years back by successfully defending Iva Gruber, in the so-called Flypaper Murder Trial. Mrs. Gruber, having been smacked around once too often by Mr. Gruber, was accused of boiling the arsenic off pest strips and slipping it into her husband's Old Milwaukee. Somehow Reggie convinced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the jury to ignore both her confession and the credit-card receipts from the Home Depot where she bought the flypaper. Afterwards, he bragged that any lawyer could represent an innocent client; it took a real lawyer to defend Mrs. Gruber. Even so, it was one thing to admire a lawyer's legerdemain from a safe distance and quite another when it was your own head in the noose.

"I want one thing clear, though," he said. "You're responsible for ultimate decisions . . . how to plead, whether to take a deal or not . . . but I make all strategic decisions. Agreed?"

I agreed.

Standing up, Reggie stuffed the police report in his briefcase. "If the prosecutor makes an offer, I'll let you know."

"No deals," I said.

"Just don't rule out an offer before you hear what it is. I still subscribe to Milton Berle's philosophy of law, 'Never put your fate in the hands of twelve people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty.' " Reggie buzzed the guard to let him out.

I didn't know if I should be more troubled by the fact that my attorney was citing Milton Berle as legal authority or that, like it or not, my fate was indeed in the hands of those twelve people. What bothered me most, though, particularly as I lay there sleepless on my bunk that night—the upper one because I was the new guy—was that Reggie never asked me whether I had killed the man or not.

Although I was able to bond out with a lien on my house, trial wasn't scheduled until eleven months later. I agonized over the status of my case every day. Each time I cornered Reggie for an update, he'd remind me that strategic decisions were his concern, mumbling something along the lines of "We're in good shape" or "Let me worry about that." My anxiety was only exacerbated by the fierce pretrial publicity and the ineluctable barrage of lawyer jokes I was forced to endure (a good start, that sort of thing). When the trial date arrived, I was ready.

It took place at the Alturas County Courthouse, an odd Art Deco building built during the Depression, replete with ornate woodwork and murals in the foyer that had been painted by starving artists commissioned by the WPA. The building was old, tired, and ready to retire. The presiding judge was an old and tired tree trunk of a man himself, the Honorable Harold Fishback.

From the moment Judge Fishback first called court to order, I knew something was off beam. First, there was the jury selection. Reggie had instructed me before the trial began to alert him to any juror that I had a bad feeling about. There was one in particular that made me uncomfortable, a stern-looking woman, a retired clerk from the IRS who resembled Bea Arthur, only meaner. I passed a note to Reggie, dutifully furnishing my disapproval. Reggie looked at the piece of paper, looked up to identify the offensive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

juror, and then shook his head, saying, "No, no, we need that one."

Then, through the first three days of the State's case, he didn't say a peep. He didn't object when Lasker, the cop who'd cuffed me, identified the golf club found at the scene as the one missing from my bag. He didn't object when the medical examiner paraded a string of photographs displaying Puckett's bashed-in head or his body lying in his front doorway, Garfield slippers still on his feet. Reggie didn't even object when Kiplinger testified about the night in the bar. Each time, when I asked him why he was sitting there like a potted plant, he said, "Don't worry, I know what I'm doing."

I was starting to wonder about that. In fact, I was feeling pretty beat up by the time the State had rested. The only positive thing that could be said for it was that the State never brought up the sordid details of some of those attorney/client conferences Puckett had had with my wife. Either the State never found out about it or couldn't prove it. Whatever the reason, it was the only consolation I had in what had been an otherwise depressing proceeding so far.

My relief was short-lived. The first witness Reggie called on my behalf was the one least friendly: my wife.

I nearly choked.

Before the news had even set in, however, Wendy strolled through the courtroom doors as if she had been announced rather than summoned, wearing a smart red dress that showed off too much leg, an elegant set of pearls, ones I had never seen before, and blond hair cut shorter than I had ever seen her wear it before, making her look more like Cameron Diaz than at any time during our marriage. She looked damn good, and that distracted me, if for only a moment, from why Reggie would even call her to testify. I mean, she defined the term "hostile witness." What was he doing?

Reggie's first question was harmless enough, easing my tension a bit. "Mrs. Harris, you filed for divorce, asserting only 'irreconcilable differences,' is that right?"

Wendy looked at me, and then said, "Yes, that's right."

"You didn't allege any mental cruelty?"

"No."

"Never claimed that my client ever beat you?"

"No."

The prosecutor, a guy named Yardley, a phlegmatic civil-servant type, seeming genuinely puzzled, stood up and said, "Your honor, the State has never alleged that Mr. Harris abused his wife, this is irrelevant to—"

Reggie stopped him, "Your honor, the State's contention is that my client is capable of violence—"

"Sustained. Move it along, Mr. Bemus."

Reggie Bemus shuffled his papers around. Without warning then, he released the question that transformed the proceeding into more of a game than a trial. "Mrs. Harris, how long had you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been sleeping with Mr. Puckett?"

I thought I hadn't heard him correctly. The courtroom erupted, however, so I knew he'd really asked it. Everyone was cackling at the same time, of course, Judge Fishback pounding his gavel, restoring order as best he could. We were all thinking the same thing. Had Reggie lost his mind? If I had had any chance of acquittal, he had just crushed it like a grape.

That's when I put it all together. Reggie had killed Puckett, and was setting me up to do the time for it.

I was on my feet, trying to insert an objection before Wendy could answer, knocking over my water glass in the process. Before I could get my objection out, however, Judge Fishback stopped me and smiled, shaking his head, saying, "No, that isn't the way it works, Mr. Harris. Only counsel of record gets to do that—but I do see your point." He turned to the jury and said, "I think this might be a good time for you good folks to take an early lunch." Everybody rose and the bailiff shuffled all twelve of them out of the courtroom like so many unwanted relatives.

After they were safely out of the room, Judge Fishback turned to me and said, "Now, Mr. Harris, you had something to say?"

"Yes, your honor. I move for a mistrial and I would like to discharge my attorney. If necessary, I will represent myself."

"On what basis?"

"He killed Martin Puckett."

Judge Fishback attempted to muffle a cough. After clearing his throat, he said, "Care to elaborate?"

I explained my theory to the court: Reggie pinched the club after we left the bar, and was representing me so he could get away with it.

"What motive would the man have, Mr. Harris?"

"Plenty. Puckett represented all of his last three wives. Mr. Bemus was going to get married again. This was a . . . *preemptive* measure."

It sounded crazy, but the judge seemed to take it seriously—so did Yardley, who was now whispering something to one of his deputies. Judge Fishback turned to Reggie and asked, "Mr. Bemus, you have anything to say for yourself?"

Reggie stood up and said, "Your honor, if I could have a few moments with my client, we can straighten this matter out. It's just a little misunderstanding."

Judge Fishback was scribbling something on his pad. After a moment, he said, "It is not uncommon for criminal defendants, unhappy with the course of trial, to seek the dismissal of their attorney. They usually cite disagreements over trial strategy. Thirty years on the bench, first time I've had a defendant say 'my lawyer done it.'"

Reggie raised his hand, like a kid in class trying to get the teacher's attention.

Judge Fishback waved him off. "Normally, I wouldn't give an alle-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gation like this one the air to breathe. I'm not saying I am now . . ."

He paused again, pushed his glasses up on his forehead, rubbing his eyes.

"Tell you what I'll do. You two have the lunch hour. If you can't resolve your differences by the end of it, we may need to hold an evidentiary hearing on the matter. Who knows? Maybe we're prosecuting the wrong man." He slammed his gavel down.

Reggie and I reconvened in one of the closet-sized conference rooms reserved for lawyers and clients. I was fuming, but before I even had a chance to say a word, Reggie shut the door behind him, blocking my exit, and said, "Don't blow it for us, Bruce."

He had balls. I had to give him that, still acting as if there was room to negotiate. "My hat's off to you," I said, "you almost got away with it."

"You can't really believe I'd kill Puckett, and frame you."

"Explains why you took me home that night. Explains why you didn't even pursue the two most logical alternative suspects, Kiplinger or Caruthers."

Reggie shook his head. "First of all, those two wing nuts had solid alibis. Kiplinger got arrested for drunk driving that night and was being booked at the time of the murder. Caruthers passed out on his office couch, janitor accounted for him the whole night. This was the most viable defense."

"How is providing me with an even better motive a good defense?"

"Jury nullification, Bruce. It's all we had."

"What are you talking about?"

"Getting the jury to ignore the evidence, ignore the jury instructions, and just choose to acquit because they feel that that's the only way that justice will be served."

"You're not serious."

"Think about it. The guy is sleeping with your wife, dividing all your assets, taking a good portion of it for himself in all those attorney fees. What reasonable person, what member of any jury, wouldn't think, if you put it all together the right way, that this guy . . . he just *needed* killing."

"Don't you think you should have run this one by me first?" I said.

"You'd never have gone for it."

That was true.

I pulled out and lit a cigarette. I had started smoking again after the arrest and I didn't particularly care right now that this was a non-smoking building. After I took a deep drag, I said, "What about police misconduct?"

"No dice. Lasker and Dunn have been around too long. As soon as they got to the scene, saw that it was going to be a high-profile case, they did it by the book. This was it, buddy. There was no faulty forensics, no race card, no domestic abuse like I had with *Gruber*. Nothing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What we had was Martin Puckett—a snake in the grass, a guy who was taking all your money, representing your wife and sleeping with her at the same time, taking advantage of her vulnerability. Hell, the jury *already* doesn't like him . . . *he's a lawyer,* for Christ's sake."

"Yeah, but so am I."

"They'll look at it as lawyers taking care of their own. Trust me."

"What about the prosecutor or Fishback?"

"Yardley is going to tell them that they have to stick to the evidence. Fishback is going to tell them that they have to follow the law. But once the jury gets in their room, away from everyone, they get to do whatever they damn well please. And if they think that maybe . . . just maybe . . . Martin Puckett was such a lowlife that he had it coming, you're in the clear."

I had to admit, crazy as it was, this made some sense.

Reggie could see he was getting through. "What I'm trying to tell you is that if all the cards are stacked against you, you gotta turn them around, use them to your advantage." By Reggie saying it that way, likening my trial to a card game, it suddenly struck me what card game we were playing.

Hearts.

In that game, you normally try to avoid being stuck with any hearts or the queen of spades at the end of each hand. If you are dealt really bad cards, however, all high hearts and spades, you reverse strategy. Instead of avoiding hearts and the queen, you go after them all. If you are successful, you win the pot and have done so by going at it from the other direction. It's a long shot but with a bad enough hand, it's the only shot you have—they call it "shooting the moon."

Reggie was playing the long shot with my freedom, however, and I wasn't as comfortable with it as he was. I sat in the chair gripping my head with my hands like a vise. I didn't know what to think. On the one hand, it made perfect sense that Reggie killed the man. Reggie was just diabolical enough to take advantage of an opportunity like that one and he certainly wouldn't have had any problems about killing Puckett if he thought he would get away with it. On the other hand, he was just egomaniacal enough to think he could get an acquittal by convincing the jury that the victim had it coming.

"How about this," Reggie said. "Back when you were still wearing that orange jumpsuit, we agreed that you would make all ultimate decisions but I would make strategic ones. If you're so paranoid you think I was scheming to kill Puckett and leave you as the fall guy, then say the word. I'll go out there and tell Fishback to declare a mistrial and take what comes."

This was my way out and I wanted to take it.

"But before you do," Reggie added, "I want you to ask yourself one question. Do you really think any other lawyer could get you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off after the cops found your golf club planted in Puckett's skull? If your answer is yes, then we part ways right now. No hard feelings."

He had me. I felt like the punk in *Dirty Harry* wondering whether Clint Eastwood had fired five shots or six. Whatever else Reggie was, he was a good lawyer. Just ask Mrs. Gruber. She admitted to killing her husband and is now spending the insurance policy she took out on his life. I went with the devil I knew.

I only half listened to the rest of the trial, the summations. I was too numb to concentrate. True to his promise, however, Reggie laid it all out the way he said he would. Puckett was a lowlife, making a fortune dividing other men's assets and sleeping with their wives. Yardley scolded the jury, saying that all the evidence proved I killed a man. Judge Fishback scolded the jury, saying they had to follow the law. It didn't really matter anymore. Either the jury was going to say Puckett had it coming or they weren't.

As I was watching them file out, I wondered—for the first time, actually—if I would ever have been in this spot if I hadn't been blaming Martin Puckett for my failed marriage in the first place.

Deliberations were quick. After only seven hours, they reached a decision. I watched them walk into their box, single file, solemn, not one looking at me, looking, instead, at the ground. The last one to take her seat was Bea Arthur, who, it turned out, was the jury foreman. Reggie had better have known what he was doing. I looked over at him. He looked pale. That couldn't be good.

The judge asked her if they had reached a verdict. She said they had. She looked at me and cracked a smile, her first, announcing, "Not Guilty."

I don't remember much after that. The place went nuts, of course. It took a good half-hour before we could even make it out of the courtroom, because so many people were mobbing the defense table. I felt as though a casket had been lifted off my back. Somehow, Reggie had done it. I was a free man.

An hour later, I finally got a chance to talk to him alone in the underground parking garage adjacent to the courthouse. The bailiff had allowed us to use the judge's private elevator to evade the media after the press conference. Reggie was already sitting in his Lexus, the engine running, when I broached the issue. After apologizing for doubting him, I reminded him of our jailhouse conversation, intending to deflate his ego a bit. "Back when the whole thing started," I said, "you gave me some bad advice."

"How you figure?" Reggie said.

"You told me never put your life in the hands of twelve people not smart enough to get out of jury duty."

"You didn't," he said. "You put your life in the hands of a lawyer smart enough to get away with murder." Reggie Bemus drove up the ramp and out of the garage. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Several weeks before his death in July 2006, Mickey Spillane said to his wife Jane, "When I'm gone, there's going to be a treasure hunt around here. Gather up everything you find and give it to Max. He'll know what to do." The "Max" in question was award-winning writer Max Allan Collins, author of Road to Perdition, *who had gone from being Spillane's defender (in the 1984 Edgar-nominated critical study* Mickey Spillane: One Lonely Knight, *written with James L. Traylor) to a collaborator on many projects, including the Mike Danger comic-book series and numerous anthologies. The Spillane novel* Dead Street, *published last year by Hard Case Crime, was completed and edited by Max Allan Collins, as was the eagerly awaited, soon-to-be-published Mike Hammer novel* The Goliath Bone *(Harcourt). Spillane left behind a number of unfinished but substantial manuscripts—including a total of six Mike Hammer novels-in-progress—as well as other unpublished material running to first chapters, partial short stories, and completed screenplays.* EQMM *approached Mr. Collins to see if a Spillane short story might be available for the revived Black Mask series—amazingly, no Spillane story has ever been published in* EQMM *before. "There's a Killer Loose!" was adapted from an unproduced radio script, circa 1953, making it truly vintage Spillane.*

THERE'S A KILLER LOOSE!

by Mickey Spillane & Max Allan Collins

Alone.

Alone. I'm alone. For how long? For how long before one of them wants to be a hero and comes up here after me?

Look at them, look at them—you can see them out the window.

A mob.

No, not an angry mob, a very patient mob. Waiting. Waiting to kill a killer.

And that killer is me.

They don't know I'm up here. All they know is that someplace in this building that has no exit, no escape, is a killer—a cold, terrifying killer who has no escape. So they wait patiently and they're right. They're right. He'll never get away.

They don't know who I am—all they want to see is one dead

©2008 Jane Spillane and Max Allan Collins

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body, that's all. They don't know who the killer is—but whoever dies in this building is the man they want, the man they've cornered. . . .

Soon, one of them will come up. One cop who wants to be a hero, and maybe he'll get me. But maybe not, too. There are still three shots left in the gun. Maybe even two will come up and each time one comes, someone will die.

Maybe the hero, and maybe me.

So I stand here at the window with the darkness wrapped around me like a shroud and look at the mob in blue, knowing that someplace is a gun that will spit a bullet into me . . . as soon as one of those blue uniforms decides to be a hero.

I should have known.

No exit. No escape. No nothing. Only a hole in the ground—a grave someplace. Yeah, I should have known. I should have felt it coming on two years ago in the mud and slime of a Korean rice field. I should have felt it coming on in the antiseptic halls of the hospital. I should have felt it coming on then.

But no, I waited until Grace was there.

Grace out of my past. Grace of eight years ago. Grace. The only girl who cared enough to come to me—Grace. I'd like to see you once more, but I won't be able to. I'll only be able to think of you in what little time is left. I can still remember that morning, when you walked into the hospital. . . .

They'd moved me to a small ward with bars on the windows. I had a little area of my own for my bed and a nightstand. My hospital gown had been exchanged for dungarees, a blue workshirt, and the kind of shoes that don't need laces. This wasn't prison. But it was close.

I was sitting in a chair by the window, and the doc, a guy about forty, skinny as hell with gray eyes that didn't blink enough, sat next to me. I stared out the window. He stared at me.

He said, "We need to go back to these periods of unconsciousness. . . ."

"Go back then."

"You have no memory at all of what—"

I shot him a glare. "What are you bothering me for? You know what it's like as well as I do."

"Mr. Devlin . . . Terry . . . we're here to help you."

"Sure, sure. Then help me by getting my ass out of here. If not, just beat it. Leave me the hell alone."

He stayed cool. "About these . . . rages that precede the loss of consciousness—"

"Look, Doc—I don't know why it happens. I just get mad. I burn up. I think I'm going to bust wide open, and then I lose it. Ask the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guy in the next bed, he'll tell you. They used to call it shell shock. Then they got polite and named it battle fatigue. The guy one bed over, he's real bright—to him I'm a gutless bastard ready for a permanent padded cell.".

The doctor said nothing, smug bastard.

"Say it, Doc—go ahead. I'm almost in that padded pad right now—bars on the windows, the doors stay locked. We eat everything with spoons."

A male orderly of about twenty-five stepped in just in time to hear me tell the doc, "Get the hell outta here! Go on, get away from me before I take you apart, you *and* your stinking hospital."

The orderly said, "You need any help, Doctor?"

"No. No, I guess not." He turned to me with a thin smile that was like a cut in his face. "Okay, Terry, if that's the way you want it. But we *will* talk later."

The orderly said, "Uh, pardon me, Doctor, but there's a young lady here to see Mr. Devlin."

The doc frowned over at his helper. "Young lady?"

"I'm afraid she has a court order with her."

The unflappable doc was suddenly flapped—his anger trumped by his amazement. "Fools," he muttered. Then he blurted, "What's the matter with them? What has to happen to make them understand?" Then he realized he'd said too much, but I read the rest in his gray eyes: *Open the doors of the cage too soon and somebody will have to die before the fools understand.*

The doc was saying, "Where is she?"

"Out in the hall."

"Bring her in." He turned back to me. "You heard that, Terry? You heard what he said?"

"Sure, I heard it. Stop bellyaching, Doc. You can't keep me here forever. Who's the babe?"

His voice was soft but with an edge: "Whoever she is, she's a fool."

"Seems like everybody who disagrees with you is a fool."

She was blond and about thirty, and her orange-and-yellow dress had an abstract pattern, but there was nothing abstract about that body. The guys in this ward may have been nuts, but they weren't *that* nuts: wolf whistles cut the air, and guys were yelling out, "Get a load of *that!*" "Oh, *man!*" "*Somebody's* lucky!"

"Dr. Thayer?" she asked. Her voice was a low, familiar purr, though I hadn't heard it in years.

He rose and went to her, saying, "That's right."

"I'm Grace Walsh. Did your orderly—"

"He told me. May I see that court order?"

"Certainly."

She handed it to him and he rustled through the several sheets. Then he said, "May I speak to you outside a moment, Miss Walsh?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She hadn't looked at me yet. "Gladly, Doctor."

They went out, but the door remained ajar. Nobody was there to stop me from going over and eavesdropping.

"I'm afraid, Miss Walsh, you're treating this situation as if this were a jail."

"Isn't it?"

"This is a hospital."

"I know—where men are statistics. Where human frailties are analyzed and then talked about in college classrooms. Where all is white and clean and cold. Sometimes a little human understanding, Doctor—or better, love—can do things all of science finds impossible."

The doc sighed. "Terry Devlin should not leave this facility. Not yet."

"Is he sick?"

"No . . . not exactly."

"Is he sane? . . . Well, *is* he?"

"I'm afraid you don't quite understand, Miss Walsh."

"I'm afraid I do understand, Doctor. You can't quite put your finger on what sanity is and what it isn't. There is no way you can really judge. So you prefer to keep him here until you find out. By that time, there'll *be* no doubt—he will be sane or insane, however you choose to label him. No, Doctor, Terry served his time in the army. As you said, this is not a jail, and I came to take him home. You see, I love the guy. Is that so hard to understand?"

"You're a young fool if—"

"Can I see him now?"

". . . Yes. I'll have his things packed." Another sigh. "He can go home whenever you're ready. Have him sign out with the supervisor."

I could hear the doc clip-clop off down the hall, and I returned to my chair at the window.

She entered and got no wolf whistles this time, though the men's eyes all went to her. She came over and stood by the empty chair next to me, and smiled down. "Hello, Terry."

"Hello, Grace."

"We can go now."

I laughed, once. "You—of all the girls . . . the only one who gives a damn is you. Of all the nasty deals I've handed out, you got the worst, and yet you still come back. You should hate me."

She sat, and her smile was like sun coming through clouds. "We ended badly, but I know what you've been through. And I know I want to love you again, Terry. I'll . . . I'll take what's left of you if I have to. If all I ever get is . . . only a little bit of you, then that's enough." She stood and moved away, saying, "I'll be waiting outside for you, Terry."

So we went out. Into the daylight of early summer, into the days

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and nights that had almost become forgotten memories, into a world of color and smell where white was only a word and antiseptic an alien odor.

A world where you could fold a woman into your arms and know that she had forgotten what you had done to her a long time ago . . .

Her little house off the park hadn't changed since I'd been there last, and I was glad of that. I never wanted anything to change again. I wanted everything to stay just the way it was. From the parlor, a tinkling of jazz piano said someone had beat us here.

"Who's that?" I asked.

She laughed lightly. "That's Joey. My little brother, all grown up. Joey, honey! Come here. . . ."

Tall, well filled-out, but with the same boyish face, Joey Walsh ambled out. He'd been a piano prodigy as a kid, and apparently was still at it. He was in a white short-sleeve shirt and black slacks and black-and-white loafers.

"Hiya, Terry," he said. His voice had changed, but his tenor still had some squeak. "It's sure good to see you."

"Brother, did you stretch out," I said, and we shook hands. "Last time I saw you, you were operating a tricycle on the street outside."

Grace took her brother's elbow and looked at him with pride. "He's the man of the house now, Terry. Isn't he big? But big as he is, I can still hug him."

And she did.

"Or," she said mock-threateningly, "whack him one if he gets out of line."

"Gimme your jacket, Terry," he said, rolling his eyes at his sis. "We have lots to talk about."

"Joey," Grace said reprovingly. "Later. . . ."

I said, "That's okay, Grace. We'll talk. First, though, I want to hear about you."

We sat on the couch, Joey saying, "Aw, nothing ever happens to me. I wasn't old enough for the last war and flubbed a physical for this one, so I keep at the piano playing to waste time."

From the kitchen, Grace called, "Don't let him kid you! He's good. He's up for a tryout with the Copa orchestra. An agent thinks he can get Joey in."

"Wow," I said. "That's the big time. How about playing something for me while your sis gets supper ready?"

"Sure. Any requests?"

"I was always a sucker for Gershwin."

"No problem."

He did "Summertime" and a piece of "Rhapsody in Blue," and then he played something that he said was original, a moody, jazzy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

piece that had nice melodies but a darkness, too. . . .

And it's the first night you're home, but while you're sitting there listening to the music, you feel the horrible spasm of maddening thought that tries to beat your consciousness into the black uncertainty that breaks down the order of sanity . . . but you think of Grace and that strange new feeling you have for her, and it goes away.

For a little while.

Only at night it comes again and you wake up trying to stifle a scream. And you do, for the sake of the beautiful woman sleeping in the room next-door—you keep it back.

And then one morning, maybe a week later, when you come in for breakfast, you find that lovely woman giving you a sideways nervous glance.

"Terry," she said, setting the table. "Hello."

"Morning." I sat. "What's the matter?"

She paused. "Terry, honey . . . last night. You were *home*, all night?"

"Well, sure. Where d'you think I was? Didn't I go off to bed while you and Joey were going over his music?"

"I . . . I know. I'm sorry. Guess I'm just jumpy this morning."

She was serving me up some scrambled eggs when Joey came into the kitchen, eyes wild. "Hey, Sis! Hey, did you see . . ." Then he noticed me and swallowed and said, "Hi, Terry."

"What do you say, kid? Where you been, so early?"

"The store. How's . . . how's everything, Terry?"

"Great. Why?" I looked from him to her. "What's eating you two?"

Grace laughed as she sat down with her own plate of food. "I guess we're both nervous trying to keep a secret. You see . . . that Copa audition has come through."

"I said he'd make good, didn't I?" I sipped orange juice. "When's it coming off, Joey?"

"A month from tomorrow. A pretty big break for me."

"Don't get yourself worked up in a bundle of nerves, kid. You'll do fine. Let me see the paper, while you grab a bite."

"The paper?" Joey glanced at Grace. "Uh, I gave it to Ben next-door—he was after the box scores. I'll go get it back from him, after I eat."

"Forget it. I'll get one myself." I pushed my cleaned plate away and stood. "You two go ahead and chow down. I'll see you both in a little while." I patted my belly. "Better walk this off."

Grace leaned forward. "Terry . . ."

"Yeah?"

". . . Nothing."

I laughed. "You two are nuttier than a Baby Ruth today. Kid, you let yourself build up a month's worth of stage fright, and you'll blow it. Cool it, now, okay?"

He smiled. "Okay."

But they both still seemed tighter than a snare drum. What the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hell was up?

I'd barely stepped out of the front door into a summer breeze when a familiar figure fell in alongside me. No hospital whites, a distinguished business suit, but the same gray eyes.

"Well, Dr. Thayer," I said. "Checking up on your old patients?"

"That's right, Terry. How're you getting along?"

"Look . . ."

"Let's keep it pleasant, Terry. I'm not here to give you a bad time, I'm just interested. Whatever you do could have a great effect on the future of other patients."

"So I'm a test case, huh? Well, I don't mind. Come on, we can walk and talk at the same time."

That was when I noticed another familiar face: the doc's orderly, still in white, seated in a blue Chevy at the curb, on the passenger side. He leaned his buzz-cut head out and said, "Want me to come along, Doctor?"

"Sure," Thayer said. "No sense you staying in the car, nice day like this."

I gave the doc a look. "You figure you need a bodyguard?"

"He's come in handy before."

We began to walk, with the orderly trailing us.

The doctor asked, "How've you been feeling lately?"

"Guess."

"All right, I will. Your days are better. Your hopes brighter. You've got something to look at, and forward to, now. But at night . . . ?"

"Yeah."

"At night, the fears come back. You feel the emptiness . . . and the thing inside you starts to work again. You lie in bed all tightened up with the sweat pouring off you."

"Then I get it under control," I said, "and go to sleep."

"Go to sleep? Or do you black out, Terry? Is it *really* sleep?"

I stopped and faced him. "Why don't you shut the hell up?"

"I'm only guessing, Terry."

"Guess again, then."

We walked some more. A kid on the corner was peddling his papers and asked, "Paper, mister?"

"Yeah." I gave him a dime and had a look at the front page and went cold all over. The tabloid headline screamed: A KILLER IS LOOSE!

"Look at that picture closely, Terry," Thayer said, at my shoulder. "He's dead. Brutally murdered. Young college kid taking a walk in the park last night. Nothing taken from him. No known enemies. Just a sudden attack and a brutal murder. As if . . . as if a maniac had jumped him."

I muttered, "You're the maniac. . . ."

"Me?"

"Hell, Doc, I was in bed. I went to sleep. Grace and Joey—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I know. I spoke to them already. . . . Terry, I think—"

I took him and shook him by his fancy lapels. "I got a prescription for you, Doc—get your ass out of here. Get out of here before you get hurt."

The orderly was moving forward, saying, "Doctor?"

I let him go, and the doc said, "No, it's all right. Terry . . . I'll be seeing you again."

"Yeah. Nice to have something to look forward to."

And that night I couldn't sleep at all, or the next night. Then finally I was so tired, I stretched out in my clothes to relax and read a little, but I couldn't stay awake and that was the night it happened again.

Frantic knocks at the guest-room door awoke me, accompanied by Grace's muffled cries of "Terry! Terry! You there? . . . *Terry!*"

Then Joey's voice: "I'll try it, Sis—*Terry!*"

"Yeah!" I said, sitting up, mind and mouth still thick with sleep. "Yeah, what's the matter? Wait a minute." I got into my shoes and went over and opened the door.

Grace, in a silk robe, was trying to stay calm but I could see alarm in her eyes. "You're . . . dressed."

"*Still* dressed. Fell asleep in my clothes. I was dead tired."

"You *have* been here, haven't you? Right here?"

"Of course. I was sleeping. What time is it, anyway?"

"Three in the morning," she said.

Joey, in his pajamas, his gaze piercing in that baby face, asked, "You haven't gone out?"

I looked from Grace to Joey and back again. "What happened?"

Grace's voice was soft with fear. "A woman's been killed, Terry. In the park. I'm surprised the commotion outside didn't wake you, too. . . . Where are you *going*?"

I said, "I want to see for myself."

Joey said, "Wait'll I get dressed. I'll go with you! I'll—"

"Don't bother, kid. I'd sooner go alone."

Then you go out and the darkness outside is almost the same darkness that crowds in on you when you feel that strange emptiness in your mind. Even the sounds are there, but they turn out to be the voices of a milling, curious mob. A mad mob whose anger is tinged with a deadly, righteous indignation.

Then there's one face in a uniform standing over a blanketed form on the ground and you hear his voice, too.

The cop stuck his flashlight in my face and asked, "Who are you, mister?"

"Get that damn light out of my eyes."

"I asked you something."

"Terry Devlin. I live on Westchester, right beside the park."

"Well, you can go on back. There's nothing here to see."

I nodded toward the spectators. "Yeah, sure."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But as I turned to go, he called out, "Wait a minute! Haven't I seen you around before?"

"Probably. Like I said, I live right over there."

"I don't mean on the street."

"Maybe you saw my picture in the papers."

"Why would I do that?"

I made a face. "I was a war hero. At least that's what they said."

"Really? Well, the war's over. You can go home now."

So I turned away and started back through the mob, even became part of it for a few minutes, long enough to hear what they were thinking.

A middle-aged guy was saying, "Sure, the police give the same old story—he'll be apprehended. They got clues, they say. So what happens in the meantime? I got to cross this park every night after work. Maybe I should get myself an armed guard!"

"Quit yapping," his pal said. "The cops—"

"Hell with the cops. We're supposed to sit around and worry about our families, too, I suppose? Maybe that killer will take it in his batty head to go looking in houses for somebody to bump off, if the park is empty. I'm not sweating my family out every night. From now on, I go out with a gun, and I'm not the only one. We'll get the neighbors together. We'll patrol the place until we get him, no matter how long it takes."

I got out of there fast. I wanted to scream at him to tell him, no! It shouldn't be done like that. The killer is a sick man. *He's sick!* You can't just murder a sick man, even if he is a killer!

But I got out because you don't let them know those feelings. It might make them start thinking . . .

And all the way home you feel the surging of your mind trying to break out of its prison, but the lock is still too strong while you're awake and you keep it in place.

And for two days, you sleep all day, staying awake at night, so you can control that other person inside you. . . .

Joey was in the parlor playing his jazz compositions. I liked the kid's stuff, but that bluesy undercurrent brought out dark thoughts in me. Next to me on the couch in the front room, Grace put a hand on my arm.

"Why don't you go to bed, Terry?"

"I can't, honey. I like to stay awake and just look at you."

Her smile was lovely and loving. "Remember a long time ago? How we used to stay up all night, watching the moon play tricks on the water?"

"I wish there'd never been any years in between."

"There never will again. I love you, Terry."

"Grace . . . come here." I kissed her, and her mouth was a giving thing, soft and warm and wet. "I love you, baby. I wish we were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back there again. I wouldn't hurt you this time."

She drew away a little. "No . . . we're older now. It's better this way. It's easier to forgive . . . forget. It's easier to love, completely now." She shook her head and the blond locks bounced. "No, I wouldn't go back. You're all mine now, Terry. I wouldn't go back because . . . well, back there I lost you. And I don't ever want to lose you again."

"Baby, you're the only one who ever really wanted me."

"That's why I never stopped loving you."

We kissed again, and she whispered, "You could sleep with me tonight. I could watch over you . . ."

"What about your brother?"

"None of his business. He'll be out of here before you know it, if that Copa job takes off."

"It will. Why don't we wait till then?"

She looked a little hurt, but then said, "Sure. A few days or even weeks won't be anything."

I wasn't ready to take a chance on hurting her again. If I was doing these things, did she really want to have shared a bed with a killer? Could I trust myself not to make her the next victim?

The doorbell rang and Grace said, "I'll go," and got it.

I couldn't see the door from where I sat, but I heard her voice go from a warm, "Yes?" to an icy, "Oh . . . well."

Dr. Thayer said, "May I come in?"

Joey's piano playing had stopped when the bell rang and he called, "Who is it, Sis?"

Thayer called back, "A friend!"

I joined Grace at the doorway and met the doc's gray eyes. "What do you want?"

"I thought I'd come back to see how things were going," he said to me. Then to Grace: "Do you mind?"

Resigned, she said, "No, Doctor, not at all. Come in, please."

Hatless, he was again in a crisp business suit. "It was quite a trial getting here—I had to cross the park and cut between the citizens and the police, who've got a cordon around the place. I was stopped four times."

"Yes," Grace said, "there's been more . . . trouble."

"Worse than trouble, Miss Walsh. Murders."

Joey came in from the parlor and frowned at the doc. "Say, aren't you—"

"That's right, Joey," Grace said. "This is Terry's doctor. Will you sit down, Dr. Thayer?"

"I can't stay long. I would like to speak to you alone, however."

Grace turned to us. "Terry . . . Joey . . . do you mind?"

"No," Joey said with a shrug. "No, it's okay. We'll hop out to the kitchen and make a drink."

The kid nodded to me and I followed him. He went to the cup-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

board where Grace kept the hard stuff and I sat at the kitchen table.

Joey asked, "What's this all about, Terry?"

"You know these medics, they're always sticking their noses in."

"Ah, Sis can handle him." Now he was looking in the fridge. "See any ginger ale around?"

"We're all out."

"Hold the fort—I'll go pick some up next-door."

He went out the back way and I took the opportunity to get up and move closer to the archway between rooms, where I could hear them talking out there.

About me.

Thayer was saying, "You sure about this?"

"I'm telling you, Doctor," Grace said, "there has been no sign of any recurrence of his trouble. Oh, he's been moody at times, and perhaps depressed, but that's common to all of us."

"I'm not accusing him. My concern is deeper than that. I told you before that he wasn't ready yet. Now there's this trouble."

"Doctor . . ."

"Inside each of us are two persons—one is generally benign, a social creature that represents everything positive we as a species are capable of. The other person within us can be a very destructive force. It causes trouble, murder, war. Usually it's under control. In some cases, it can be partially controlled, but for that brief span of time when it's loose, it's a clever, crafty, murderous thing. You see, I've seen Terry when he's gone into those periods of black transformation . . . when he is lost to that other, darker self. It was that other person who allowed him to kill so violently in Korea who got him his medals. It was that crafty other person who kept him alive. . . . I'm hoping *we* can still keep him alive."

"We will, Doctor. Terry's the only one I've ever wanted . . . or loved. I'll always be with him."

"I hope so. I hope so. You're his one best hope. You are the personification of our better self, if I may be forgiven for saying so. Now . . . if you'll excuse me . . ."

Joey came in through the back door with a bottle of Canada Dry and said, "Now let's make up those drinks."

I turned toward him. "No thanks, Joey."

"What are you staring at, Terry? You're giving me the creeps. . . ."

"I have to prove something, kid." I headed for the back door.

He gave me an alarmed look. "Terry, where are you going?"

"It's night. When the blackness comes."

"What are you *talking* about?"

"If anything should happen to me, let it happen tonight. . . . I'm going for a walk through the park."

"You crazy? With that mob out there? With all those cops wanting to be heroes? You out of your mind, Terry?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's what I want to find out, kid."

Joey was heading toward the other room, saying, "No, you *can't* go. . . . Sis will—"

But that was all I heard as the door slammed behind me.

Then you're outside where the air is fresh and clean and the sharp pounding in your head doesn't seem to hurt so much. And for some reason, as you walk along the stone barricade that encloses the park, your eyes suddenly get sharper, your ears pick up every note of sound and, strangely enough, the pain goes away and you're a new man, a different man.

You feel huge and strong and mad. The anger is a boiling thing and you see the shadows that are people trying to stay hidden, but they can't hide from your eyes. Then suddenly your whole mind seems to go to pieces and you hurdle the wall and cling to the trees inside the park, stumbling through the bushes aimlessly.

Then the darkness closes in completely, even before you let out that feeble call to Grace, to come help you . . .

It's the whistle that shatters the darkness you were in for God knows how long . . . a police whistle . . . and you hear voices . . .

"Another dead one. I passed here two minutes ago. He can't be too far away. Search the area. Snap it up!"

That shrill police whistle again, and men moving through bushes . . . and you know what happened, and you *know* who they want, not just to arrest, but to kill!

Then you run blindly, seeking escape. But they hear you, and see the fresh, torn trail you leave behind. And one of them is right there in front of you.

He can't get the whistle up in time, or the gun. My fists are a blur and I have no sense of propelling them at him, a shape in blue with a red smear for a face going down like a bag of laundry off the back of a truck.

And now I have his gun. *I have his gun!* I won't be so easy to take now. . . .

Maybe twenty feet to the street. I run, then stop short, panting—the way back home blocked off by cops and their sawhorses. And the citizens, my good neighbors, are all over the park, prowling in packs of two and three, trigger-happy jerks with guns somebody brought home from one war or another . . . looking for me. But if I can get over there to the buildings and cross the roofs . . .

The pounding of my running feet cannot blot out more shrill police whistles.

"There he goes! Watch it . . . he's got my gun!"

"Under the light . . . by the wall . . ."

They see me . . . They're closing in . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Keep him away from the warehouses!"

Then when you're clear and the doorway to escape is open, a blue shape steps out of the shadows and without thinking, you smash the gun across his jaw and he goes down.

You don't go in—there may be more inside.

So you just run, past the vacant lot, to the one building left, and you do it without thinking, because suddenly you're inside the darkness of the entrance, and too late you remember that this building stands alone, a wide border of empty lots around it . . . with no way to escape.

"He's in there!"

"He can't get away. Cover all exits. Sergeant—go around the back with a few men. Tell Warren to put in a call for the riot squad."

"Who is he? Anybody see who he is?"

"Nobody got a good look. But he's the only one in that abandoned building, unless some tramp is camping out. Whoever is in that building, that's the one we want. Keep this mob under control! He can't get away from us now. . . . Come on, let's try the front arch."

You feel behind you for a door. It's there, and it's open. Then you step inside and see the outlines of the steps that disappear above you into the darkness and you hear them coming closer. You run up into that darkness and let it take you. . . .

So now I'm alone with the patient mob down there waiting for me. And at least one cop wanting to be a hero. Yeah, a hero. He'll want to be a hero, so soon he'll come up. The hero cop.

Grace, if I could see you just once more . . . just once more before I die. But I won't. I'll only be able to think of you in what little time is left.

I hear faint scraping and I know—*somebody got in!*

Somebody's here in this room with me now. He's being quiet, but he isn't quiet enough. I can see him now. His eyes aren't adjusted to the darkness yet, like mine. He's standing over there in a corner.

I raise the gun. "Drop it, Copper."

I hear the gun clatter to the floorboards, and a sharp intake of breath. "Terry . . . it's me . . . Joey."

"Joey?"

"I came to get you out of here. Look, I played around this building when I was a kid. There's one exit here that isn't covered—the coal chute. There's a ladder in it. We can get out, Terry. I can get you out."

"You're crazy, kid, coming up here. That mob downstairs doesn't care who they find dead! All they want is a body. . . ." Juices flow through you, survival juices that haven't flowed through your veins since you were in a tropical hell.

"Terry?"

". . . You know something, kid?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What?"

"If I killed you . . . and they found you? Their killer would be dead. They wouldn't look any farther, Joey."

"Terry . . . cut it out, Terry!"

"Why'd you bring a gun, Joey?"

"You think it was to kill you with? Don't be a jerk. If that's what I wanted, I could let that mob or the cops get you! The gun was for anybody who tried to stop me." Even in the near darkness, the tears glisten as they roll down his cheeks. "I don't care what you did. I don't care. Terry, you're the only thing in the world that Grace wants, and I'm not letting a goddamn mob or those cops get you!"

"You think you can stop them?"

"We start by getting you out of here. Let's go, Terry. Let's get the hell out of here!"

"No. No. They'll keep looking. I don't want them to look anymore. I want them to find their killer, Joey. The cops down there want to be heroes—one or two in particular sure want to be, after I roughed them up. So I'll let one be a hero."

"What?"

"Go over by that window, kid. Stand there where they can see you to shoot at. I want them to get their killer. Then I'll go back—alone. I know how to get out now, thanks."

"Terry . . . no . . ."

"Go ahead, Joey. Move. Grace will get what she wants. She'll get me. You ought to be happy about that."

Light lances through the window; the searchlights are on. Pretty soon there won't even be a shadow in this place.

"Move over to the window, kid."

He's bawling now.

"Do it, kid."

"No, Terry . . . no . . ."

The gunshot comes sharp, like a whip crack out of the blackness.

I twist around, but only see the hero cop for a second before he ducks back down the stairwell.

My back hurts. It feels all empty inside me. They can turn the lights off now. They have their killer.

You'd think they heard me—the beams are cutting off, all but one, which catches Joey as he crawls out, stark white light painting his face. *His face!*

Kill-crazy ecstasy . . . a madman's face . . .

Hell—I wasn't the killer: *Joey was.*

Gunshots echo up the stairwell, and Joey's scream starts strong and dwindles as he falls down the stairs. The hero cop thinks he's just given me a second slug—he's wrong—but he got the right guy.

I'm almost dead now, and Joey is, too, a shot-up pile of torn flesh and broken bones at the bottom of those stairs . . . but a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

killer is still loose.

A killer named Grace.

Lovely Grace, wonderful Grace, nurturing Grace . . . who took a guy the doctors thought was insane out of a hospital. Thoughtful Grace, who needed a fall guy to pin a murder rap on because her brother was a killer.

That hero cop didn't kill me—she did. For her baby brother, who made the mad music.

She set me up out of love, and love makes even normal people do crazy things. Like me. I'm going to die loving her in spite of it, so turns out the doc was right.

I am out of my mind. ●

Report Unwanted Telemarketing Calls

DialAmerica, Inc. is the only telephone solicitor authorized by Dell Magazines to sell subscriptions to our magazines. If you are contacted by any other telemarketer offering you a new or renewal subscription to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* we strongly suggest the following:

- Do not give your credit card information or your checking account information to them.
- Do not engage in conversation. If you must speak with the caller, be sure to get his or her name, company name, and telephone number. Tell the caller that you deal directly with the publisher and not to call you again. Hang up. If the company calls again after being instructed not to, it is now in violation of FCC regulations.
- Sign up with the "National Do Not Call Registry." Most telemarketers will not call your number once it has been on the registry for 31 days. Register online at https://www.donotcall.gov or call 1-888-382-1222 from the telephone or cell phone number you want to register. Registration is free.
- Contact us immediately at 1-800-220-7443, or by email at contactus@pennypublications.com to report any questionable calls. Please be sure to give us the date, time, name, and telephone number of the company that called.

We are trying very hard to protect our customers from unscrupulous business practices, and encourage you to deal directly with us. Our subscription offices are located at 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855. This return address is printed on every renewal notice or invoice that comes from us.

We guarantee great reading at an excellent price, with the very best in customer service. Thank you for your readership!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Black-Tie Affair

by Barbara Cleverly

"Go on! You're having a laugh, Ellie! Evening suit? Me? Sorry, love. Look—if you wouldn't mind making that smart-casual, there's a bash on in town we could . . ."

Ellie Hardwick grunted with irritation and hung up as soon as she politely could. She crossed Jon Sanderson off her list. And his was the last name. Her boss looked up from the elevation he was sketching and grinned at her across the office.

"Bad luck, Ellie! What's the matter with the young men of the east of England that you can't tempt a single one of them to escort you to the social gathering of the season?"

"Not a man under forty owns a black tie and dinner jacket anymore. They've all given them away to Oxfam." She waved an embossed invitation card at him and read: "*Lord and Lady Redman request the pleasure of the company of Ellie Hardwick to help them celebrate their first year in residence at Hallowes Hall.* So far so good, but then it says along the bottom: *Dinner and dancing. Black tie.* And I'm obviously not expected to turn up alone, because there's a note from Alicia paper-clipped to the card: *Dear Ellie, Do so hope you can come, and please bring the gentleman of your choice.*"

"Well, that's not necessarily the same as a choice gentleman," Charles quibbled. "You'll have to spread your net wider and not be so fussy," he added. "Think of the good of the firm. You did a splendid job on that old ruin of a house. The kitchen you designed is the most glamorous in Suffolk, and there'll be hundreds of envious women there asking how it was done. Alicia's showing off the house but she's also showing off her architect. Go! And take some of our cards with you. Leave them discreetly about the place."

Barbara Cleverly appeared on the mystery scene in 2002, to great acclaim, with the novel *The Last Kashmiri Rose.* The book, which introduced Joseph Sandilands, a Metropolitan Police officer on assignment in India, was named a *New York Times* Notable Book. In Ms. Cleverly's seventh in the series, Sandilands travels to Paris. *PW*'s starred review called it "a sophisticated whodunit with full-blooded characters."

©2008 by Barbara Cleverly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellie shuddered.

"That's an order, not a suggestion. Only sorry I can't manage it myself. Now who can we think of? What about old Hamish Peabody—he can still cut a rug and his last op was a roaring success, they say."

Ellie wasn't listening. She was hunting glumly through her directory.

"Got it!" Charles shouted in triumph. "Just the bloke! Young, handsome, energetic, polished . . . well, fairly polished . . . and in his line of work he'd be bound to have some fancy suiting!"

"Johnny Depp's tied up that weekend," she muttered.

"No, no! I'm talking about that police inspector who keeps hauling you out of trouble. What's his name . . . ? Richard Something. Or was it Something Richard? Very traditional lot, the police. They have black-tie do's all the time. Bet he's got just the thing."

"Detective Inspector Richard Jennings?" Ellie gave a grating laugh. "Never managed to get it together, Charles, if you know what I mean. Both busy people, demanding bosses, beepers calling us back to the office just as things get interesting. Haven't seen him for six months. Fast-track man that he was, he's probably been promoted to the Met by now. Still . . . good dancer and quite a charmer . . . I'll give it a go. You're not to interrupt.

". . . oh, hello, Richard. Ellie Hardwick here."

"Ellie? Oh, *Ellie!*"

She rushed on, embarrassed that he quite obviously had not been sitting by the phone expecting to hear from her for the last few months. "Look, I was wondering if you owned a dinner suit and if you wouldn't mind putting it on to escort me to a glamorous event the Saturday after next? Pink champagne, jazz band, the cream of the county there . . ."

"I'll stop you right there and say—no, sorry, I have no such garment in my wardrobe."

She must have sighed into the phone. He went on: "Is there a problem? Ellie? Is it important? Where is this event?"

"Hallowes Hall. The Redmans are celebrating a year's residence and I was to be paraded as their architect."

There was a silence as he absorbed this, then: "Hallowes Hall? This is the newly created peer of the realm—Lord Redman of Deben or some such—we're talking about, is it?"

"That one. 'Services to inner-city regeneration' and all that."

"Huh! It used to be called 'property development' in my day. Mmm. And you know these people well? I had no idea."

"I only know them in a professional capacity but, as an architect, you do discover some intimate details—which I never relay so don't ask."

"Listen—my father has four evening outfits . . ."

"Four?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He never throws anything away and as his size increases he adds to his stock. And lends them out to me in emergencies. I've reached his size two. Okay, Ellie, I'll borrow it and turn up in accordance with time and place you specify. Send me an e-mail. Schedule permitting, of course. You know what it's like."

"You'll come? Great! But look, Richard, just in case you're called out at the last minute—book your father in for me, would you? Size four will be just fine!"

"Not on your life!" She was reassured to hear his familiar chuckle. "I wouldn't trust the old rogue within a hundred yards of you!"

Ellie was more than content, she felt a stirring of excited anticipation as she glanced at her escort, guiding his old Saab skillfully down the rutted track between the cornfields towards the sound of jazzy music and laughter of a party well underway at the Hall ahead of them. DCI Jennings, done up in his number 2 outfit and smelling alluringly of something expensive and woody, was reassuringly correct.

"Don't worry, Ellie," he said, catching her appraising glance, "I won't let you down. You won't hear a clank of handcuffs in my back pocket and I won't put on my robot-copper's voice."

He slowed to take in the long, low lines of the refurbished house and gave an appreciative whistle.

"Fifteenth century," Ellie commented. "It's got the lot—king posts in the roof, screens, arches, panelled doors, even a priest's hole." She looked at the steeply pitched roof with its gently undulating coverlet of plain tiles ranging in colour from a red so dark as to be almost black, through buff, to white where the lime-torching on the underside showed through. "So glad I managed to persuade Ronald not to strip the roof and retile. Those beauties are good for a few more years yet."

The long front was plastered and colour-washed to a burnt orange, dark under the eaves, fading away to nothing at the brick plinth which ran round the house. As they watched, the setting sun, still undefeated on this late June evening, caught the leaded panes and sent back a dazzle of golden light. A double line of stout candles of medieval size wavering within their glass holders welcomed guests across the vast lawn to the marquee from where the sounds of jollity were coming.

Welcoming also, and attentive, was the pair of uniformed valets who took the car keys, exchanging masculine pleasantries with Jennings, and they set off across the grass towards the distant figures of Ronald and Alicia, standing ready to greet the last few guests to appear. Richard, with an old-fashioned gesture, took her arm and put it through his and she found, in her high heels, she was glad of the support.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Squeals of recognition, tuberose-scented air-kisses, and manly handshakes welcomed them to the party, and Ellie was amused to see the interested look the dark-haired and willowy Alicia cast at the inspector. Amused also to hear him introduce himself to their host. "How do you do, sir? Richard Jennings. Criminologist. Cambridge."

"Oh, I say! D'you hear that, Alicia? A Cambridge academic. Another one! There's a professor of something or other poking about the place somewhere . . . perhaps you know each other?"

"Medieval history," Alicia hissed, suddenly witchlike in her intensity. "Marcus is a historian. He's inspecting our cock's-head hinges."

Ronald rolled his eyes. "Well, there you are," he said happily. "My good wife's latest enthusiasm and I blame you, Ellie, for getting her going. She's never at home these days—forever off on some historical workshop or tracking some luckless ancestor back through the rotting branches of her family tree. You must meet this chap. If you can find him. Probably burrowed into the woodwork by now. Pink champagne? For you both? Or is the architect driving? Oh, before you move off, Ellie—do feel free to show your young man around the house. He'll be very impressed, I know!"

"What's that you're muttering, Richard?" Ellie asked as they wandered over to the marquee clutching their champagne.

"Nouveau riche, arriviste, exploitative, bulldozing chancer." He smiled. "That's what I was saying. And I was trying to be polite. If I were telling the whole truth I'd add—crook. How on earth did you get involved with these people, Ellie?"

"The usual way. Estate agent's recommendation. They pass our name to rich clients who need good guidance from a firm that knows the local property and isn't going to rip them off. The Redmans aren't generally known to be—what did you say?—something slanderous—crooks? In fact, they're making quite a niche for themselves in local society." She waved a hand around at the glittering crowd. Bare shoulders, supercilious glances, diamonds winking at the throat, overloud laughter, flushed faces, and male guffaws. "A *Lord,* however fresh the paint on his escutcheon, cuts some ice in this county. This is their small new pond. They want to be big fish in it and they've got the clout to do it. If they're at all uncertain they can hire people like me to advise them. Don't knock wealth, Richard, it creates a lot of work locally. This place kept a team of craftsmen going for a year."

"Right. But you've finished here now, I take it? Hope you have. Well, shall we mingle with the crowd? I see some faces even I recognise. Let's just hope they don't recognise *me*. Cast a discreet glance, will you, at the blokes over there at the table under the apple tree. I've got mug shots of the lot of them back at HQ. And one of them has just got back from Spain. The one with the full suntan. Flew in from the Costa del Crime two days ago. Now, he's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

particularly interesting." He fell silent for a moment, glancing around uneasily, eyes seeking the gesticulating figure of their host. "This could turn nasty. I wonder if old Ron's aware of the serpent lurking in his shrubbery?" he murmured. "He's annoyed some influential people lately. Could have brought down retribution on his head . . ."

"They don't look at all suspicious to me. Successful businessmen, you'd say. Probably give generously to charity and own half a racehorse . . ."

"And support a heavy alimony habit," said Jennings, "judging by the third wives clustering around."

"How can you tell they're third wives?"

"Not difficult. Get your eye in, Ellie. First wives at this binge are in gold lamé and real jewels, dressed for a night at the Royal Opera House . . . a night ten years ago. The second wives are in Chloé and Manolos with a sun-bed tan, streaked hair, and a watchful expression. Third wives are young and skinny as alley cats and tug at their hair extensions in boredom."

Ellie looked at him in surprise. It occurred to her that she really knew very little about DI Jennings. "I had no idea you were so observant! What are you then? Some sort of profiler? Okay, Mr. Clever, tell me what category Alicia comes into."

He pretended to reflect. "Not immediately obvious. Dark hair and mysterious dark eyes. Intelligent-looking. Far too good for Ron. Stylish woman. Versace, would you say?—that white clinging thing? Something as tasteful as it's expensive, anyway. She's a good bit younger than Ron, so I'll go for second wife, but with more than a touch of independence about her."

"You're pretty good. That's right. Except I know she favours Dior. Not sure *I'd* know the difference. Second wife, ambitious, wealthy in her own right. Family money—that's what gives her the independence you've noticed. You know—I've actually heard some women say—squirming with gratitude—'he's offered to give me a new kitchen.' I pass those jobs on to Charles. Now, Alicia tells Ron what he's going to get! And she has the sense to listen to the experts she's paying. But all this is rather alarming. Lord knows what pigeonhole you've put *me* into."

His face softened. "Can't categorise you. A one-off. Nearest I can get is arty-chic. In that floating greenery-yellery thing you'd better watch out. Wander off into the orchard in the gloaming and the spirits of the place will claim you for their own. I don't want to have to explain you've been carried off by a hairy-legged woodland faun to the sound of panpipes. So stay close."

Ellie sighed and decided that would be no problem.

They ate supper at a table with people Ellie knew in the rose-draped marquee, danced, and chatted, but she waited in vain for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him to suggest a stroll through the orchard or the herb garden. Annoyingly, he seemed happy to stay in the candlelit orbit of the other guests, drinking sparingly, eyes watchful.

After darkness had fallen he suddenly looked at his watch, excused himself, and set off in the direction of the cloakrooms. He returned quickly and, smiling, said: "Ellie, before it gets too late, why don't you do as our host invited and show me round your handiwork? The house seems to be open—there are people wandering in and out."

Puzzled, she accompanied him as he walked quickly from room to room on the ground floor, even poking his nose into the outside log store and the gardener's lavatory.

"Not thinking of making an offer for it, are you, Richard?"

"I only wish! Upstairs? Did you have a hand in that?"

"Not really. I just oversaw the refurbishment and reconstruction of the original fittings. Cosmetic mostly. Still, it's pretty glamorous up there. Alicia's had the good taste to leave well alone and let the bones of the house show through. You can get a real feel for medieval living. Of course, it's a wonderful foil for her with her *belle dame sans merci* looks. You know—all that 'lily on the brow, and on thy cheeks a fading rose' stuff . . ."

"I think that was her lovelorn knight-at-arms? The lady herself was: *Full beautiful—a faery's child,"* he said, trotting upstairs ahead of her. *"Her hair was long, her foot was light, And her eyes were wild."*

"Mmm . . . yes . . . I can see the Lady Alicia sighing and moaning in these surroundings. Not so sure about old Ron," he said, shining a slim torch onto ancient timbers, tapestries, copper bowls of potpourri, and coarse rush carpets underfoot. A swift inspection of the rooms revealed draped four-poster beds, two of them suspiciously a-tremble. Finally, "Is there any room we haven't looked into?"

"Only the priest's hole. This was a Roman Catholic house in a sea of Parliamentary supporters. They had to have somewhere to hide the visiting clergy from Cromwell's squaddies."

"Show me."

The narrow space was cleverly contrived between two rooms in such a way that the regular march of the windows was not interrupted. Ellie showed him the exact spot to press on the panelling, which sprang back an inch, allowing her to put her fingers behind it and slide it back sideways, revealing a closed door.

As she clicked on the external light, Ellie had sudden misgivings. "I don't feel comfortable doing this," she said. "Well, you never know what we might disturb . . . there's a sort of daybed in there . . . champagne flowing for hours . . . some people might think it the perfect spot for a bit of . . ."

He wasn't listening. "Tell me what this stuff is," he said, shining the torch onto the carpet. "These bits of loose vegetable matter."

"Um . . . Oh . . . that'll be dried hops."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hops? What are you on about?"

"This was once the house of a Suffolk brewing family. I found bits of equipment about the place, even traces of hops in the rafters. Alicia thought it was very romantic and she had some garlands sent from Hereford and draped them all over in there. She thought it helped to freshen the atmosphere in a closed space. She was right, actually. But I see what you're getting at," she said, lowering her voice. "Someone's been in here. Let's go away."

But he had already thrown the door open. She peered over his outstretched arm as he stood, shocked and silent, taking in the scene. "Oh my God!" he breathed. "Oh, how could we have got it so wrong?"

Ellie wriggled under his arm and stood, wide-eyed and staring. As she had feared, the room was occupied. A figure, apparently asleep, was draped elegantly over the daybed. Alicia was unnaturally still. Her long silk dress flowed along, outlining her slender limbs; one high-heeled diamanté sandal hung negligently from her toe, the other lay discarded by the bed. Her black hair snaked across the pillow outlining her pallid features. Around her neck was knotted, with crazy insouciance, a man's black bow tie. On a small table at her elbow were two glasses of pink champagne still fizzing energetically with life, an obscene note in what Ellie was quite certain was a place of death.

Jennings sprang into action, pushing Ellie into a corner and performing the automatic gestures to check for signs of life. He shook his head. "She's dead," he said. "And only minutes ago, I'd say." He took his cell phone from his pocket and made two crisp calls, unintelligible to Ellie.

"But *why* is she dead?" Ellie asked. "What happened? Heart attack? There's no blood."

Jennings eased the bow tie away from the throat with his fingers. "Mustn't ruin the scene for SOCO," he commented, "but that's a touch Dior never thought of. She's been throttled with this and then some joker retied it in the approved manner. Some cool nerve! Takes me forever to knot my own and here's someone meticulously tying it around the neck of a woman he's just squeezed the life out of."

Ellie began to shake with horror as the enormity of the scene hit her. "That's mad! It's sick! It's . . . it's . . . so calculated . . . passionless! Who would . . . ?"

"Ally! Alicia! You up here? The Tennisons are just leaving and would like to say goodbye. I say—Ally!"

Heavy feet thumped along the corridor and doors banged open and shut. Jennings stepped into the corridor. "In here, Redman!" he said.

In the end, Ellie had to admit Ron had behaved rather well. Demands for instant police assistance had been cut short by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quick flash of a warrant card, a short explanation, one or two more phone calls. Jennings was in charge and wheels unnoticed by anyone were in motion. With a second shock that evening, Ellie realised her invitation had been attractive to the inspector not so much for herself as for the innocent entrée it had provided for the county's top brass into a scene they wished to observe more closely.

Ron was pointing at the tie at his wife's neck. "Well, there you are, Mr. Plod," he said to Jennings. "Even I could solve this one. Line the male guests up against the stable wall, target the one without a necktie, and shoot 'im. Easy peasy. And anyway," he said with the trace of a smug leer, "I recognise this one. Huh! Silk with silver stripes! It's a bit fancy and wouldn't it be! I can lead you straight to its fancy owner. The Cambridge Casanova!" He stared for a moment at the pair of champagne glasses. "Cheating cow!" was his epitaph on his dead wife.

The uniformed support was already in place below, and again Ellie wondered at the speed of deployment. Female guests were being ushered into the drawing room of the house, but Ellie managed to stay close to Jennings, pretending to assist. The men were herded into the marquee. One or two were being sent back, grumbling, from the car park.

It could have been laughable. Ellie had to swallow back giggles of hysteria as she surveyed the lineup of fifty puzzled and outraged guests. Forty-nine were still more or less correctly attired. Only one sported a shirt open at the neck. Tall and good-looking with a boyish shock of yellow hair and merry blue eyes, he was familiar to Ellie. "Marcus de Staines," she whispered to Jennings. "The chinless and now apparently tie-less wonder. Heartthrob of daytime TV. Medieval historian of repute."

"Well, let's see what this will do for his reputation," said Jennings. With a cold gesture he attempted to calm Ron, who was twitching with vindictive glee and pointing the righteous finger of an outraged husband at the young man.

"That's him! That's the bastard who's murdered Alicia!" Ron broke out. "No tie! Look—no tie! That's the . . ." he dredged his vocabulary for a suitably medieval epithet, ". . . cuckolding killer! He should be stocked . . . pilloried . . . hanged, drawn and quartered!"

Jennings set about rescuing the astonished and red-faced don from the hideous scene which seemed about to break out. With the relief of men who suddenly find the cloud of suspicion has lifted from them, the other men responded in varying degrees of outrage, turning, predictably, on the guilty party. "I say! Good Lord! What an arsehole! Can't believe it!" Fists were clenched. The Lord High Sheriff of Essex called for order. A retired Lt. Colonel reached for a phantom sabre at his side. Warrant card flashing, Jennings moved through them, confident and calming.

"Just step this way with me, sir," he said mildly, cutting de Staines

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of the crowd. "A few things to clear up if you wouldn't mind."

Ellie found she had been left behind with Ron. A minute later they had retreated to the kitchen and she was going through the familiar ritual of making him a cup of tea. To her alarm, as the shock and tension cleared he grabbed her and sobbed noisily into her shoulder. "I'm such a fool, Ellie! How can I not have seen what was going on? Had *you* any idea? The pair of you were pretty thick, I always thought . . ." He sighed and sniffed. "All those working historical weekends away! And they were at it under my roof! In my own priest's hole!"

He recovered sufficiently to take a comforting sip of Earl Grey. "Tell your boyfriend thank you from me, will you, Ellie? For being here. Taking control. Piece of luck a policeman being right there on the spot! And a smart one at that. I mean—what are the chances of a Cambridge criminologist tripping over the body? That would really have appealed to Alicia." He sighed with affected respect for the artistic sensitivity of his dead wife then, quickly changing emotional gear, his eyes narrowed in sudden thought and he confided: "Sorry to say such a thing at such a time . . . probably very inappropriate but . . . this could do his career no harm, you know. Had you thought of that?"

"No, Ron," she said through gritted teeth. "But I'm sure *he* has."

She finally caught up with her escort in the car park. It had been transformed into a crime scene. Blue and white plastic ribbons fluttered, outlining the field; arc lamps illuminated with a ghastly glow the guests, silent now and shell-shocked, who were being ushered back into the real world by the two valets, now openly wearing their police IDs.

A police car eased up and Ellie watched as Marcus de Staines was handed into the backseat and driven off. A second car drove over to Jennings and he opened the rear door. He gestured to a group of officers and they came forward leading a figure she recognised from the party. Now in plastic handcuffs and—oddly—without his shoes—he trod gingerly in his socks through the rutted stubble to the car and with a brief sneer for Jennings, slid inside.

Two minutes later the same procedure was repeated as Ron emerged from the house, being hustled along between two officers.

"*Three* suspects, Richard? That's quite a haul for one night. Are there any more? Would you mind telling me what's going on?" said Ellie.

"Not the time. Not the place," he said. "But I'll tell you what *is*. Ten minutes from now. Your cottage. I can leave all this to the scene-of-crime officers now, and my sergeant. Shall we make a run for it?"

She realised that he was on the point of exhaustion and gently prised his car keys from his hand.

❖ ❖ ❖

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Blue Mountain be all right?" she called from the kitchen.

"Rather have cocoa," came the sleepy reply.

She sat sipping her drink sitting on a cushion at his feet as he slumped on her sofa. "Poor young man! Poor silly Marcus!" she said. "Why do you suppose he did it? I expect she'd refused to run away with him. Led him on and then decided at the last minute to stick with her husband."

"Not at all," he said. "They *were* going away together. Tickets booked for Istanbul next Tuesday."

"Oh, no! And Ron found out, followed them upstairs, found them in flagrante delicto, and killed her?"

"First saying: 'Would you mind removing your tie, old man, just the thing I need to strangle this strumpet'? Come on, Ellie! Give you a clue—neither Marcus nor Ron went near that room before she died."

Ellie thought for a minute. "The hops? That bloke you were marching through the car park in his socks?"

"Yes. The suntanned mystery man from Spain. I had his shoes bagged. He'd got traces of hops on the soles. He was up there, all right."

"Wow! Was *he* Alicia's lover, too?"

"No. Her killer. A hired killer. It's what he does."

"But he didn't look like a . . . what would you call him? . . . a hit man!" Ellie protested, trying and failing to recollect his features.

"What would you expect? A ponytail and tattoos? They blend in. He was just a man in an evening suit like all the others. He managed to slide away out of my sight and I thought I was watching him."

"And I hardly need to ask whose signature was on his cheque?"

"Ron's. One of his underworld contacts summoned to lend a hand. We got it so wrong, Ellie! We've been keeping an eye on Ron and his shady dealings for some time, and when another of our familiar faces cuts loose from his sunny retreat and embarks on a jaunt to deepest Suffolk we assumed . . . we thought Ron himself was the target. Plenty of people would have been grateful for that! But there I was, all prepared to defend our host against evil-doers. When I noticed Suntan Man had gone missing from the party, I rang my lads in the car park and told them to hang on to him if he fetched up there. Just in case. As they were holding his keys—no problem. I dashed through the house expecting to find our host bludgeoned to death in the billiard room . . . garrotted in the garage . . . but no—it was our newly ennobled lord himself who was doing the hiring."

"Because Alicia had been disporting herself with a don? Hardly makes sense, Richard. I mean, I know—knew—them as a couple. He'd have smacked her across the chops and threatened to horsewhip the guy. She'd have responded by beating him to a pulp and walking out. At the very worst, he'd have sold his story to a red-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

top newssheet. He wouldn't even have bothered to divorce her—not with alimony being what it is these days."

"Exactly! You're getting there! He was about to lose a fortune whichever way you look at it. Her own wealth would no longer be available to him, and he might well find himself caught in the steel jaws of alimony payments. And then there's the not-negligible sum she'd settled on him in insurance. They had reciprocal policies. A lot at risk, Ellie."

"So, enter the killer. But what was all that business with the tie, Richard?"

"You can't just have the body of your wife discovered in your house without raising suspicions and bringing a nuisance of a police officer or two onto the scene. I think he was watching out for someone who could witness the discovery of the body. We fitted the bill nicely. And, distraught with grief—well, as near as he could manage—he was able to identify the necktie and direct attention to the poor sap he'd set up to take the blame. The tie was a nice touch. It could have been a credit card, a cell phone, a sheet of runic script, anything of de Staines's to put him at the scene. Taking revenge on the man who'd deceived him into the bargain. Neat.

"I interviewed the luckless and clueless don and he told me he'd taken his tie off along with his jacket in the gents to wash his face and cool off when he got back from piggling about in the roof—freshening himself up for his tryst with Alicia, no doubt. When he'd got the soap out of his eyes and looked up, the tie had disappeared. Several blokes had gone into the gents at the same time and left in a bunch. He couldn't say who'd taken it. A silly prank, he thought, or a genuine mistake. That little touch would have been the killer's own. They like to improvise at the scene—use what's to hand."

"But why retie it so perfectly?"

"Our man goes in for the whimsical touch. It's his signature. Gets him a rep in the right quarters—the artist of assassination."

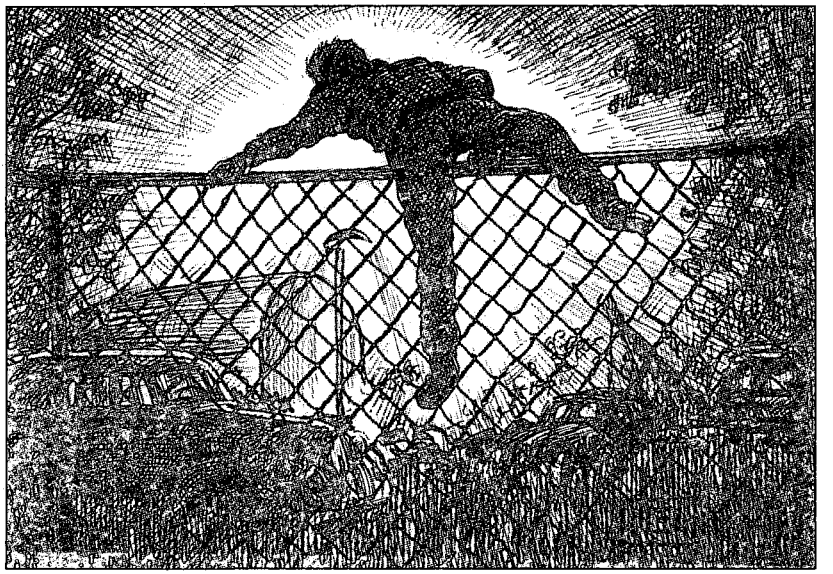
"What'll happen to Ron now? To think I made him a cup of tea! Let him slobber all over my Missoni frock!"

The inspector grinned with satisfaction. "At this moment, Ron's in an office at HQ in front of a flickering screen, commenting on his financial affairs to an interested team of specialists. No telling how high his dubious connections go! We've been longing to make our way through to that."

"Ah. Well. Glad I was able to be of some help," she said stonily.

He took her cup from her and placed it with his on a table. In a second he'd slid to the floor and clamped her in a tight hug. "Sorry about that. Unforgivable! Because I was preoccupied, it doesn't mean I wasn't having a good time! All the same—not quite my scene. This is more like it. I say, Ellie," he said uncertainly, tugging at his throat, "you won't misinterpret the gesture . . . won't scream for help and run a mile, will you, if I start to take off this bloody awful tie?" ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Art by Mark Evan Walker

Body and Fender

by James H. Cobb

"Back in 1948, I guess Fairmont, Indiana, would have been called a 'one-horse town' by a lot of folks," my friend Kevin Pulaski mused. "In fact, we only had one of a lot of things: one doctor, one lawyer, one cop on the beat. We never seemed to need any more than that.

"We also had only one what you'd call 'consulting detective.' The funny thing was that it was me, and I just didn't know it. Or at least, I didn't until the day Betty Harbor came crying into Sam Redfern's gas station . . ."

On the weekends and during school vacations I worked at Sam's Gilmore Service Station up at the north end of Main Street and, man, I loved that job! I got to mess around with cars all day long. My brother Frank got stuck with mowing the lawns, and I had plenty of side time to work on my own hot rod, all while knocking down a whole buck an hour. Pure velvet!

Mostly I was my own boss, too. Sam Redfern, the station owner, was an old-time board-track racing driver who'd taught me most of my driving and auto mechanics. He ran with a real mellow attitude

©2008 by James H. Cobb

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toward life and once he was satisfied I could handle things, he'd leave me in charge and go fishin'.

There were, however, other folks around town who didn't quite share his high opinion of me.

I was sitting in the station's office with my engineer's boots propped on the tool-scarred old desk and Cab Calloway ragin' on the office radio when a gleaming black battlewagon of a Packard 120 swung off Main Street and up to the pumps. Right then I knew that Mr. Norman Harbor must damn near be out of gas. That would be the only thing that would bring him into Redfern's Service, at least while I was working there.

1950s hot-rodder Kevin Pulaski, hero of this series at short-story length for *EQMM*, was also the star of the 2001 novel *West on 66* (St. Martin's Minotaur). His creator, James H. Cobb, who hails from Tacoma, Washington, is better known as the author of futuristic techno-thrillers, including *Sea Strike*, *Target Lock*, and *Choosers of the Slain* (all from Berkley). Another Pulaski story is slated for early 2009. ¶

Oh well, business was business and a customer was a customer. Levering myself out of Sam's squeaky swivel chair, I ambled out to see what one of my more rabid adult dis-admirers wanted.

Squarish, jowly, and tight-lipped, Mr. Harbor looked and dressed more like a bank manager than the owner of the largest feed lot in Grant County. Still, that was his action, and on a hot summer's day you could smell him making money for a good ten miles downwind.

The girl sitting demurely beside him on the Packard's front seat was a whole different deal. Betty Harbor was a fellow junior at Fairmont High and she had soft honey-colored hair and big hazel eyes, and I could testify from personal experience that she smelled like baby powder and wildflowers.

I did my best cool-cat saunter as I circled around the front of the Packard, and I made a point of shooting Betty a grin and a nod before addressing her old man. "Hey, Mr. H. Fill her up and check the oil?"

I had him by the shorts and he knew it. It was a ten-mile push to the next station.

"Don't bother with the oil, just give me five gallons of regular," he grated. "And don't slop it on the coachwork."

He didn't have to tell me that. I already knew Mr. Harbor to be as much a fanatic about his car's appearance as he was about his daughter's virtue. The big sedan was a 1941 model but it still looked as if it had just rolled out of the showroom. Buying the Packard had been Mr. Harbor's statement that he'd arrived in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

big time. As Betty could testify, putting a scratch on it could be worth your life.

I could sympathize. I'm particular about my wheels too. But I think it says a lot about a guy if he fusses over his wax job while he's buying cheap gas.

I pumped five gallons into the glass tower of the Tokheim gas dispenser and shot it into the Packard's tank, all the while feeling the disapproval radiating from behind the wheel. I secured the pump and the gas cap and returned to the driver's window.

"That'll be a buck twenty-two."

Mr. Harbor winced and dug out his wallet. "Redfern must enjoy highway robbery."

"On the highway you'd be paying a whole quarter a gallon," I replied. "And you should be coming up on a lube job and oil change pretty soon. You want to make an appointment?"

"I intend to, with a decent mechanic at a reputable service station." He bore down on the "decent" and "reputable" like he was squashing bugs.

"Suit yourself, Mr. H." I collected for the gas, then leaned down and looked across to the Packard's prettier passenger. "Hey Betty, I'll be running the A-Bomb at Gas City Friday night. You going to make it up?"

"No, she is not!" Mr. Harbor stabbed his foot down on the starter. The Packard's straight-eight gagged on the low octane for a moment, then caught, and Mr. Harbor surged back onto Main Street, not quite clipping Les Stodacher in his old green Willys.

"Roar with Gilmore," I commented after him, hooking my thumbs into the back pockets of my jeans. He'd never even given me a chance to give him his green stamps.

I chuckled to myself and shook my head. Betty hadn't said a word throughout the whole exchange, but the long, lingering look she'd aimed out of the Packard's rear window indicated that Friday night wasn't a totally dead proposition.

Betty was the pretty bone Mr. H. had to pick with me. Like a lot of other responsible Fairmont adults, he viewed me as the town's premier juvenile delinquent and major threat to Western civilization. And, like a lot of other parents, he'd reared back on his hind legs and told his daughter, "You stay away from that Pulaski boy. He's nothing but trouble."

I'd have to thank him for that one of these days.

Speaking as an expert on teenaged females, I can tell you right now that most of them, or at least most of the ones worth bothering with, have two outstanding traits. They're as curious as a Siamese cat and as willful as a Missouri mule. As soon as Betty had heard that I was nothing but trouble she'd made it her life's work to find out just what kind of trouble I was.

I'd been happy to show her, too.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That was enough to put me on Mr. Harbor's personal shit list. He'd even tried to get Sam Redfern to fire me from my job. And when Sam had told him to shove it, Mr. H. had given my boss and his service station a slot on his list as well.

Ah well, not everybody can like you, and if the ones that do are the pretty, curvy, nice-smelling ones with the higher voices, you're still doing okay.

It was looking to be a quiet afternoon with no shop work on the board, so I fired up the A-Bomb and backed her into the station's service bay, easing her in over the grease pit. I wanted to stiffen that rear spring pack a scootch before racing Friday. As I tinkered with my rod's suspension I thought some about Betty, but not much about her father.

Not then, anyway.

It turned out to be a purely so-so night up at the Gas City dirt track, for me, anyway. Betty hadn't been able to sneak away, and the spring modification I'd tried out on the Bomb hadn't worked out as I'd hoped, either. But then, that's hot-rodding.

The final finished late, and afterwards, I cruised down to the Route 22 Diner and hung out for a while, drinking coffee, playing the jukebox, and talking dirt-track with Eddie, the night counterman. I was the last guy in the place and thinking about packing it in myself when a car sprayed gravel in the parking lot.

A minute or so later that redoubtable foe of incarnate evil, Hyram Dooley, bulldozed through the Route 22's stainless-steel doors. Fairmont's burly night marshal apparently had a bug up his butt about something and, as per usual, he had his bombsights fixed on me.

"All right, Pulaski," he demanded, bristling like a boar hog in front of a locked feed bin, "where were you at ten o'clock tonight?"

I sighed and slowly rotated my counter stool to face him. "I was sitting in the starting grid of the Gas City circle track with about three hundred people looking at me," I was pleased to be able to say. "Why?"

I'd ruined the Dewlap's night. "Well, what about the rest of your gang? Can you account for any of them?"

"Sure. Marty Snustaad and Johnny Roy Tardell were working as my pit crew. Steve Roccardi was starting two rows ahead of me with Lee Curtis and One-Speed Dean crewing for him. Clint Flock has a National Guard drill this weekend and Jeff Mulready was in the pits swearing at a lunched transmission, and I repeat, Dooley, why?"

That let the last of the air out of Fairmont's friendly neighborhood justice merchant. He sank down on the stool next to mine, with Eddie automatically shoving a cup of coffee in front of him.

"Fred Norton was killed out on County Six-A at about ten

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tonight," Dooley muttered. "He was run over. Hit-and-run."

Now the air went out of me. "You're kiddin'!"

My last nickel's worth of Perry Como trailed into silence on the counter Play-O-Matic. I knew Mr. Norton. Everybody around Fairmont pretty much knows everybody else. Fred Norton raised hay and ran a little twelve-cow dairy herd on the side. He had a son on our basketball team and his daughter was the treasurer of our Future Homemakers of America branch. He never missed a Western down at the Palace Theater.

"I wish I was," Dooley replied, shoving his uniform cap back on his stubbly red hair. "One of his cows got out and he was looking for it along the road. Whoever ran him down didn't even stop."

"And you just naturally figured it had to be a hot-rodder, huh?"

"I'm checking on everybody!" Dooley snapped back. "I want this son of a bitch, whoever he is!" He subsided and stared down at his coffee, not much interested in drinking it. "I was the one who found him lying out there. There wasn't anything I could do for him."

I guess there are days when it's not easy being a cop, not even a town-clown cop like Dooley.

"That's gonna be tough on his family," I said after a while. "Andy's probably gonna have to quit school to keep the farm going."

"Probably."

I guess if it had been anybody else I'd have put my hand on his shoulder or something, but Dooley and I just don't work like that. I dropped a quarter on the counter to cover my tab and the tip and slid off my stool. "I guess I better be heading home."

I started for the diner's door then paused. "Hey, Dooley."

He looked around.

"I'll talk to the guys. If we see anything, like a car with fresh front-end damage, we'll pass you the word. Okay?"

The Dewlap didn't exactly smile but he nodded. "Okay. Thanks."

"Be cool, man."

As I drove home through the Indiana midnight, I still wasn't thinking about Mr. Harbor. That didn't happen until the next day.

The next afternoon I'd just finished repacking the wheel bearings on Ned Carter's Diamond Reo ton and a half when I heard someone calling for me from the station's office, a light girl's voice, sounding scared. When I got in from the service bay, I found Betty Harbor standing beside the desk. Her eyes were red and she was having a hard time with her breathing, like she'd been trying to run and cry at the same time.

"Whoa! Take it easy!" I'd have put my arm around her, only she was wearing a white twin-set sweater and I was grease up to the elbows. I hooked the toe of my engineer's boot under a rung of the office stool and slid it over to her. "What's knittin', kitten? Did you mistake the gas pedal for the brakes again?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her stubby blond ponytail whipped her shoulders as she shook her head. "No, Kevin, it's worse than that. Lots worse. It's Dad."

Oh great. "What's with the warden this time?" I started degreasing my hands with a wad of brick-colored shop rag.

"He's been arrested."

"Huh?" I almost dropped the shop rag. "Your father?"

"Yes!" she blurted on. "They think he's the one who ran over Mr. Norton last night."

Tilt!

I sank down into the desk chair and swiveled it to face her. "Okay. Now just sit down and tell me the deal, doll. What exactly happened?"

Betty took a deep, sniffy breath and hopped up onto her stool. "I'd just come home for lunch when we got a call from the county sheriff's office in Marion. Dad's been arrested up in Gas City. They say he ran over Mr. Norton last night and that he tried to bribe a garage man to fix the damage on his car and not tell anyone about it."

"Which garage was it?" I pretty much knew every mechanic and body-and-fender man in the county.

"I think they said Sutton's."

That figured. If I was going to choose a garage owner to bribe, it'd probably be Ozzie Sutton. He ran a one-man auto shop, salvage yard, and two-bit used-car lot on State 18 east of Gas City. Back when I was young and tender and first putting the A-Bomb together, Sutton had screwed me royally on some car parts. I wasn't the first, or the last, either.

Betty sniffed up another couple of eyefuls of tears. "This garage man said Dad brought our car in this morning with a smashed fender. He said Dad offered him five hundred dollars to fix it right away and not tell anyone. But when he found blood on the fender, he called the sheriff."

I felt myself frowning. That sure didn't sound like ol' Oz's speed at all, neither the calling the sheriff scene, nor giving the pass to the five yards.

"Has your dad been in any kind of a pile-up recently? Your wheels looked okay the last time he had them here at the station."

"No! Our car hasn't been in any kind of an accident," she denied hotly, then hesitantly. "Well, at least it hadn't been the last time I saw it."

"When was that?"

"Last night, just before Dad drove down to Rigdon."

Uh-oh. "You mean you didn't see it this morning?"

"Not really. Dad left way early, before Mom and I got up. I heard him drive off, but I didn't see him."

Double uh-oh. "Betty, when did your old man get home last night?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She squirmed unhappily. "Not till late. He was talking with some stock men over at the Rigdon Grange. He didn't get back till past eleven."

We were getting beyond "uh-oh" and working toward "oh shit" real fast here. Rigdon was southwest of Fairmont, and County Road 6A, where Mr. Norton had been hit, would have been a natural route to take if you were coming home from there.

Betty must have been reading my mind. Axle grease or no, she grabbed my hand. "No, Kevin! My dad didn't . . . couldn't kill anybody like that."

"Jeez, Betty. I'm sorry but you plain can't say that. I guess he wouldn't have meant to, but on a dark road at night . . . hell, it could have just happened."

"But Dad wouldn't just drive away and leave somebody to die like that," she insisted. "And he wouldn't lie about it afterwards."

She had a point. Mr. Harbor was way off my personal beam, but he was also a pretty upright character in his squaresville way. Somehow I couldn't quite see him as being that shade of yellow, either.

Betty could see me studying on it. "Please, Kevin. You helped Steve Roccardo when he got blamed for that robbery, and you found the money from the wire-mill robbery. And you helped me out when I messed up that time. I know Dad hasn't been fair to you, but please help him. I don't know who else I can go to who'd be on my side."

Oh man! Who in the heck did she think I was? A half-order of the Hardy Boys? Sure, I'd helped some buddies out of a couple of jams. but I hadn't planned on making a career out of it. I didn't even like her old man all that much! But then I didn't like seeing pretty, honey-haired girls scared and crying either. I found myself giving her hand a squeeze. "Okay, be cool, doll. I'll see what I can do."

Problem was, I wasn't sure what that would be.

Sam came back to the station an hour later with a nice string of crappies to store in the Coke cooler. He said he wouldn't mind springing me loose for the rest of the afternoon, so I drove the A-Bomb back to my house, still thinking hard about Betty's problem. I found my first break waiting for me in the living room. Mom was dressed in her tweed business suit and was just tucking her brown hair under her hat.

"Kevin, you're just in the nick of time! Your father has the car today and I have to go up to Marion. Can you drive me?"

"Sure, Mom," I replied, shrugging back into my ponyhide jacket. I'd wanted to talk with her anyway. "What's up?"

"I've had a call from Mr. Everts. He's up at the county courthouse with a new client and he needs me to take down his statement."

Like I said, Fairmont only had one of a lot of things. My mother

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was our town's only legal secretary and she worked part time for Nolan Everts, our only lawyer.

"Mom, would this new client be Mr. Harbor?"

She looked startled. "How did you know?"

I explained over the roar of my rod's exhaust on the drive up to the county seat.

Mom shook her head, one gloved hand braced against the Bomb's dashboard and the other holding her hat on against the air blast over the windshield.

"Kevin, I wish you wouldn't get involved in things like this. Your car racing is bad enough, but this playing detective is really going to get you into trouble one of these days."

"Honest to my grandma, Mom, it's not like I ever plan on it!"

I wasn't anywhere near official enough to sit in on things up at the courthouse. But I could sit in the courthouse hallway outside of Sheriff Bates's office with an ear cocked.

The sheriff and one of his deputies were inside along with Mom, Mr. Everts, and their new client, who was already giving them trouble.

I wasn't alone out in the July-stuffy hall either. A skinny middle-aged man in a shiny blue suit sat at the other end of the bench, flexing a mechanic's grimy hands and staring down at the worn linoleum. He didn't recognize me. I'd changed quite a bit from the snot-nosed fourteen-year-old he'd stuck with a dead Vertex magneto. But I sure recognized that underslung jaw and those watery grey eyes that never looked square-on at a guy. Ozzie Sutton looked tired and worried. Being around the law must have made him nervous just on general principles and giving a pass to all that easy mazuma had to have hurt.

I didn't say anything to him. I just slouched low on the cigarette-burned bench, listening to the voices leaking out of the open transom.

Mr. Everts: "As your lawyer I'm strongly advising against this, Norman. You shouldn't be saying anything to anyone just now."

Mr. Harbor: "Damn it, I want this foolishness cleared up! I was never on that road last night, and I certainly never ran over anyone!"

Sheriff Bates: "But you were at the Grange meeting in Rigdon until nine-thirty–ten o'clock or thereabouts, weren't you?"

Mr. Everts: "You don't have to answer that!"

Sheriff Bates: "We have twenty witnesses who saw him there, Nolan."

Mr. Harbor: "Yes, I was at the Grange meeting, but I didn't drive home on the county roads. I cut up to Highway Twenty-six."

Sheriff Bates: "County Six-A is the most direct route from Rigdon to Fairmont. The highway is the long way around. You have any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

particular reason for going that way?"

Mr. Everts: "You don't have to answer that, Norman!"

Mr. Harbor: "I don't like driving my car on gravel, is all. Highway Twenty-six is paved!"

Sheriff Bates: "And then you left your house the next morning at six and drove up to Gas City. Pretty early start, wasn't it, Mr. Harbor?"

Mr. Harbor: "I had an early breakfast meeting with Jim Trent, the owner of the Gas City elevator. We were discussing a grain contract."

Sheriff Bates: "And Jim Trent picked you up at Sutton's garage."

Mr. Harbor: "Yes. I left my car there to get it serviced."

Sheriff Bates: "That's another funny kind of thing, driving fifteen miles to another town just to get your oil changed."

Mr. Everts: "Norman, you do not have to say any more, and I'm saying you shouldn't!"

Mr. Harbor: "I heard that Sutton does good work cheap . . . and I have other reasons!"

Sheriff Bates: "Now, come on, Nolan, we know what Mr. Harbor's other reasons were. Deputy, bring in Mr. Sutton."

A grim-looking lawman appeared in the interrogation-room doorway and crooked a finger at Ozzie. Once he was inside the door, it didn't take long for him to open up.

Ozzie Sutton: "I'm sorry, Mr. Harbor. But a man got killed. I can't be part of covering up for that, not for no amount of money!"

Mr. Harbor: "What are you talking about?"

Sheriff Bates: "Sit down, Mr. Harbor! At nine o'clock this morning, Ozzie Sutton called this office to report a possible hit-and-run. He'd found blood on the smashed fender of your car. The fender you'd paid him five hundred dollars to repair and keep quiet about."

Mr. Harbor: "This man's lying! My car wasn't damaged, and I only paid five dollars for an oil change!"

Sheriff Bates: "Ozzie's already handed over your five hundred dollars, and the state police lab crew have examined your car. They found damage to the right front fender, headlight, and bumper compatible with that caused by a collision with an adult human body. Paint traces and glass splinters recovered from the body of Fred Norton have also been identified as coming from the same make and model as your car, and the blood smears found on the fender and bumper were of Fred Norton's blood type. Also, the only recent fingerprints found on the steering wheel of your car were your own. Any explanation for that, Mr. Harbor?"

Mr. Harbor: "That's crazy! My car wasn't damaged! When I dropped it off at Sutton's garage there wasn't a scratch on it!"

Sheriff Bates: "You have any witnesses to that, Mr. Harbor? Anyone who might have seen your car before you left home that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

morning? Anyone you might have met on the road?"

There was a long silence on the far side of the transom.

Mr. Everts: "Damn and blast it, Norman! Now you don't have anything to say?"

On the way home I treated Mom to a cold drink at the Steak & Shake drive-in in Gas City.

"I feel sorry for Betty and her family, too, Kevin," she said, sipping a lemon Coke, "but all of the evidence points to Mr. Harbor running that man down."

"I dunno." I slouched lower behind the A-Bomb's wheel. I hadn't hit the carhop up for anything. Thinking about how Betty would look when I let her down killed my appetite. "Mr. Harbor's a pain in the . . . well, he's a pain, anyway, but I can't figure him leaving a guy dead in the road like that."

"Even the best of people can panic, son."

"What's going to happen to him next, Mom?"

She sighed. "It doesn't look good at all. Mr. Everts was able to get Mr. Harbor released on bond, but he'll be going to trial for vehicular homicide. He's already stated he was in possession of his automobile at the approximate time of the hit-and-run, and he had a reason to be on that road at the time of the killing. He also insists that his car was undamaged when he dropped it off at Sutton's garage. That can be proved untrue both from Mr. Sutton's testimony and from the physical evidence."

I snorted. "I wouldn't put too much faith in anything Ozzie Sutton has to say about anything. He's the worst gas-rag mechanic in the county, and those heaps he sells have so much sawdust packed into their transmissions they've got termites crawlin' out of the gear groups."

"He was still honest enough to hand over the money Mr. Harbor gave him."

"I can't figure that either, Mom. I can't see Sutton giving up five hundred bucks even if it was his own grandmother who got run over."

She shrugged her slim shoulders. "Being an accessory to vehicular homicide could be a bit too rich for his blood. Beyond that, the real evidence rests with the car itself."

"Yeah," I had to agree, "unless somebody else might have stolen it while . . . Nah, that doesn't work. Mr. Harbor insisted that his one-twenty wasn't damaged when he left his house with it this morning. If only he could come up with somebody who might have seen his car before he got to Sutton's."

"The early hour will work against him. It reduces the odds of anyone having seen him and it hints at the possibility that he didn't want to be seen. So does the fact that he took his car to an out-of-the-way garage so far from his home."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I could have explained that one, but there was no sense in bringing that particular subject up at the moment. "How d'you think your boss is going to handle this, Mom?"

"I don't know. It's going to be difficult. You can challenge a witness's testimony by cross-examination, but that's hard to do with physical evidence. His own automobile makes up the major part of the case against Mr. Harbor and you can't put a car on the witness stand."

She shook her head and handed me her glass to put back on the door tray. "At any rate, we'd best be going. Your father will be home soon and I'll be late with dinner as it is."

It was a funny kind of a thing, but as we drove back to Fairmont, I kept flipping Mom's words over in my head. You can't cross-examine a car.

Maybe not. But then again, maybe you can.

Like cars won't talk to most people, but sometimes they'll talk to me.

Out in the night the frogs and the katydids were arguing with each other. I took a couple of running steps, then launched myself up the chain-link fence that surrounded the county impound yard. The fencing jangled as I hauled myself over the top, and gravel scrunched under my boots as I dropped inside. Snaking into the deeper pool of shadow beside a '37 Chevy coupe, I crouched for a couple of very long minutes, watching for movement in the glare of the single arc light that covered the yard and listening for any reaction from the watchman's shack.

Man, this would be a whole lot easier if it was the way it was in mystery novels. Ellery Queen just has his old man wave his badge around and they let him in anywhere.

Things stayed cool. No action around the darkened car outlines and the only sound from the shack was a whisper of the Great Gildersleeve yelling at Leroy. Doing my best Errol-Flynn-in-*Destination-Burma* imitation, I worked my way around the yard's perimeter to the stately slab-sided silhouette of Mr. Harbor's '41 Packard.

Hunkering beside the sedan's passenger-side front fender, I dug the flashlight out of my hip pocket and got to work.

It didn't look good. The heavy-gauge steel of the fender was partially caved in, the right wing of the bumper was bent back, and the right headlight, in its teardrop-shaped housing, was smashed. There was no way Mr. H. could have missed all of that damage on the drive up to Gas City. And you could almost see how Mr. Norton's body had indented the metal. You couldn't miss the splattered blood, either. No doubt about it, man. This was the iron that had done the deed.

Still, I went over it one more time, trying to not think about what everyone said had happened with the car, but just about what I was seeing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That's what you've gotta do sometimes. It's like when you're tearing down a bad engine. You can be so sure you think you know what the problem is that you can totally miss how it might really be botched up. Dig it?

This is where I might have an edge over the state police-lab guys. I was no scientist, just a snot-nosed high-school rodney, but thanks to fate and Betty Harbor's driving, it happened that I knew this particular car fender really well. If anything at all was wrong about this setup, I should be able to spot it.

I ran my fingers over the crumpled steel, feeling the cracked paint flake away from the compression buckles in the metal. Then I stiffened and looked closer. Digging out my pocket knife, I flipped open the long blade and worked on the fender for a minute or so, making absolutely dead sure.

There wasn't anything wrong about this setup. Everything with the fender was just as it should be. *And that's what was wrong!*

I flipped onto my back and slid under the Packard's fender well, checking out some other stuff.

Rolling out from under the car, I switched off the flashlight and hunkered in the dark again, taking things apart in my mind and putting them back together in the only way that could fit.

I clicked my flash back on for a second and checked my wrist watch. I'd have just enough time to make it over to the Steak & Shake and order half a dozen hamburgers to go before they closed for the night.

I had a junkyard dog to bribe.

Sutton's Auto Service on Route 18 wasn't much worth talking about; a couple of battered Texas Blue pumps in front of a Quonset-hut office, a scrapwood service bay and paint stand tacked on to one end. A row of tired, used iron lined the highway out front with "Runs Good" and "Real Bargain" signs stuck under the windshield wipers, while two acres of car corpses rusted behind a splintered board fence out back.

Ozzie liked to brag about his "low overhead" and it showed. He hadn't even sprung for a decent watchdog. You could count every rib on the old bluetick hound guarding his salvage yard, and by the third double-deluxe steakburger with cheese, that dog and I were blood brothers. He gave me a guided tour of the establishment, licking his chops and wagging his tail. It only took about ten minutes of flashlight work for me to find everything I needed to see. I left the bluetick lying bloated amid the burger wrappers and headed back to Fairmont. Now I had to hunt me up a night marshal.

Ever since drag racing and girl parking had become my two favorite outdoor sports, I'd gotten pretty good at projecting just where the Dewlap might lurk at any particular hour of the night. And at one A.M., our valiant guardian of the peace would be sitting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind the Healthknit underwear billboard out on the Alsbury Pike, primed and ready to catch a few speeders or a few Zs, whichever came along first.

Tonight, the Zs had won. The Dewlap snoozed behind the wheel of his black town Plymouth, snorting and grumbling like a newborn baby rhino. It would be pure cruelty to disturb his honest working-man's slumber.

I slammed the flat of my hand down on the roof of his car. "Dooley, me lad! Awake! Crime runs rampant in the streets!"

His head whipped forward and smacked against the rim of the steering wheel. His cap flipped off and he got tangled up in the horn ring. I leaned against the Plymouth's door post and enjoyed the swearing and the honking. We were back to where we were supposed to be.

"Pulaski, what in *thee* hell do you think you're doing?" the Dewlap bellowed.

"I'm proving that Mr. Harbor didn't run over Fred Norton. You wanna play, too?"

The next afternoon we sort of wrapped everything up in the back booth of the Marion Hotel coffee shop, just down the street from the county courthouse. Mom and Mr. Everts were there, as were Dooley, Betty Harbor, and me. Mr. Harbor was the guest of honor. The county court had just returned his bond money after dropping all charges, and the sheriff had taken a new statement from him as part of the arrest of Ozzie Sutton. Mr. H. was still a little bit glassy-eyed about how things had played out.

"You were lucky, Norman," my mom's white-haired boss said, "You were lucky your daughter believed in you and that she knew my secretary's son." The lawyer nodded in my direction. "He was the one who got you out of this mess."

Mr. Harbor glanced at me and flinched, looking for a second like he wished he was back in his jail cell. I just grinned back at him, one leather-jacketed arm draped around his daughter's shoulder. There are moments when this detective jazz is pretty cool.

"If that's the case, then I appreciate it," he muttered. "But I'd still like to know how it happened."

"To tell the truth, so would I," Mr. Everts confessed. "Kevin and Marshal Dooley had dealt with most of the situation by the time I arrived at the courthouse. You'd been cleared, and Ozzie Sutton was already in custody." The lawyer cocked a shaggy eyebrow at me. "Maybe you can explain it, boy?"

"Sure thing, Mr. E.," I replied. "It was something my mom said."

Mom was sitting at the other side of the table beside Mr. Everts, beaming at me like she'd invented me, which, I guess, she had.

"She told me something about physical evidence being tough to beat in court because you couldn't cross-examine it. But that's what I did."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How do you mean?" Mr. Everts questioned.

"I mean that last night I busted into the county impound yard and took another look at Mr. Harbor's Packard."

Dooley muttered something under his breath, but I ignored him. "The biggest hunk of evidence against Mr. Harbor was his car. By his own admission, he was the one driving his wheels at the time of the hit-and-run, and the state police-lab guys confirmed that his Packard one-twenty, or at least *parts* of it, the fender and bumper, had hit Mr. Norton.

"But when I looked over his car last night, I discovered that something was wrong with it. Or rather, there was something *right* with it that shouldn't have been."

Everyone at the table looked puzzled except for Betty, and she just looked sheepish.

"We can get to that in a second," I continued. "The big deal is that the right front fender, headlight, and bumper mounted on Mr. Harbor's car weren't the factory originals. They were from another black nineteen forty-one Packard one-twenty, a car that belonged to Ozzie Sutton."

"The Department of Motor Vehicles never listed Sutton as ever owning a Packard, black or otherwise," Mr. Everts commented.

"He hadn't, until the afternoon prior to the accident," Dooley cut in. "He'd bought it at an estate auction down in Indianapolis and he was driving it back for resale on his used-car lot. Sutton's already confessed to hoisting a few too many on his way home and to accidentally running down Fred Norton. When he realized that there'd been no witnesses, he tried to cover things up."

"Yeah," I took over the story again. "He hadn't notified the Indiana DMV of the car's purchase yet or transferred the Packard's title to his name. Nobody official knew that he owned the car. If he could just make the damaged one-twenty disappear, he'd be in the clear.

"So, that's what he did. After he got the car back to his garage he spent the rest of the night taking it completely apart and scattering the components around his salvage yard. Dig?"

"I 'dig,'" Mr. Everts said slowly. "Rather like an automotive version of Poe's 'Purloined Letter.' He hid the evidence in plain sight, knowing the police would be looking for an intact, roadworthy vehicle."

"Pretty much," I agreed. They'd made us read old Edgar Allan in one of my English classes. "After I'd finished up at the county impound I busted into Sutton's junkyard and found pieces of freshly dismantled Packard all over the place."

"Could you please use some term other than 'busted into,' Kevin?" Mom murmured.

"Sorry, Mom. How about saying I 'investigated' Ozzie Sutton's junkyard? Either way, I was able to show the sheriff's deputies engine and frame numbers that matched those on the car that had been sold in Indianapolis, as well as the undamaged fender and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bumper that had been taken from Mr. Harbor's car."

"But if Sutton had already made his automobile disappear, why in blazes try and incriminate me!" Mr. Harbor demanded.

"Because anybody who's ever listened to *The FBI in Peace and War* knows what a police laboratory can do these days. Ozzie knew they might be able to identify the death car as being a one-twenty model Packard by the traces it left on Mr. Norton's body. He also knew that if this was the case, the police would start hunting down all of the one-twenty Packards in the area. That could lead back to him.

"Then, Sutton gets what he sees as a huge break. The very next morning some guy pulls into his shop looking to get a lube job and an oil change done on a black nineteen forty-one Packard one-twenty identical to the one he's just killed a man with. It wasn't that much of a coincidence. The one-twenty series sedan was the most popular model produced of that year of Packard, and black was the most popular color.

"After you leave your car with him, Mr. Harbor, Sutton carefully swaps the fender, headlight, and bumper from his Packard onto yours, wearing gloves so he won't leave fingerprints. He then mixes up a batch of phony road mud and paints it over the bolt heads and on the inside of the fender well, baking it dry with a body-shop heat lamp to hide the fact the exchange has been made. Then he calls the sheriff and dumps the blame for the hit-and-run on you. The five hundred bucks he hands over was just a gimmick to make his story sound really solid. I guess he figured it was a fair exchange for ducking a long stretch in prison."

"My God." Mr. Harbor stared down at the tabletop. "My God."

I couldn't help but rub it in a little. "I'm telling you, Mr. H., it pays to patronize your trusted neighborhood service station."

"Hush now, Kevin," Mom murmured. Still, she was smiling a little.

"It was a damn close thing, Norman," Mr. Everts said. "Damn close." The lawyer looked across the table at me. "But now, son, just what was it that tipped you off to Sutton's scheme?"

"It's like this. There was something kind of special about the right front fender of Mr. Harbor's car. Something that even he didn't know about." I looked at Betty. "I'm sorry, doll, but we're gonna have to tell 'em."

"Go ahead," she grinned back. "I don't mind for this."

"Okay. When I made the scene with the front fender of Mr. Harbor's Packard I found that the black surface paint had been cracked and chipped in places by the impact and that underneath there was a gray coat of factory primer."

"What's funny about that?" Mr. Harbor demanded.

"Just that something else should have been there. You see, Mr. H., this was the second time the right front fender of your car's been replaced."

"What?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's true, Dad," Betty said in a tiny voice. "Remember when you went up to Chicago on business a couple of months ago? Well, I took the car out and I had a little accident . . ."

Mr. H.'s eyes bulged "You what?"

"She nudged one of the concrete pylons up at the Steak and Shake," I took over, "and she came into Redfern's to see if I could patch up the damage before you got back into town. And I couldn't. I only had one afternoon to work with and the fender was totally shot. If I was going to keep Betty from being grounded for the next couple of centuries, I had to do things kind of fast and dirty.

"I called around to some auto salvage yards and found somebody who had a right front fender off a hulked Packard one-twenty. The problem was, that car had been painted green, not black. I didn't have the time to completely strip and re-primer the fender, so I just roughened up the surface some and shot a new coat of paint on over the old one. I got the replacement fender mounted and your car put back together again just about five minutes before your train pulled in."

I grinned and slouched lower on the booth bench. "You never noticed a thing, Mr. H., but when I was out at the impound yard the other night I realized that green underlayer of paint was missing. That's how I figured out that somebody else had pulled another switcheroo with your car's fender. I worked the rest out from that."

Mom gave a long-suffering sigh and rubbed her temples. "From the day he was born I knew he was going to be the interesting one."

A purplish tinge crept across Mr. Harbor's face. "Betty, you mean you had an accident with the car and you didn't tell me? And then you conspired with this . . . this . . ."

Dooley cut him off. "It seems to me, Mr. Harbor, that if your daughter wasn't a lousy driver and if Pulaski here wasn't . . . whatever the heck he is . . . you'd be looking at five years in the state pen right now."

The Dewlap glanced in my direction and just maybe gave a little scootch of a wink.

"He's got you there, Norman." Mr. Everts added.

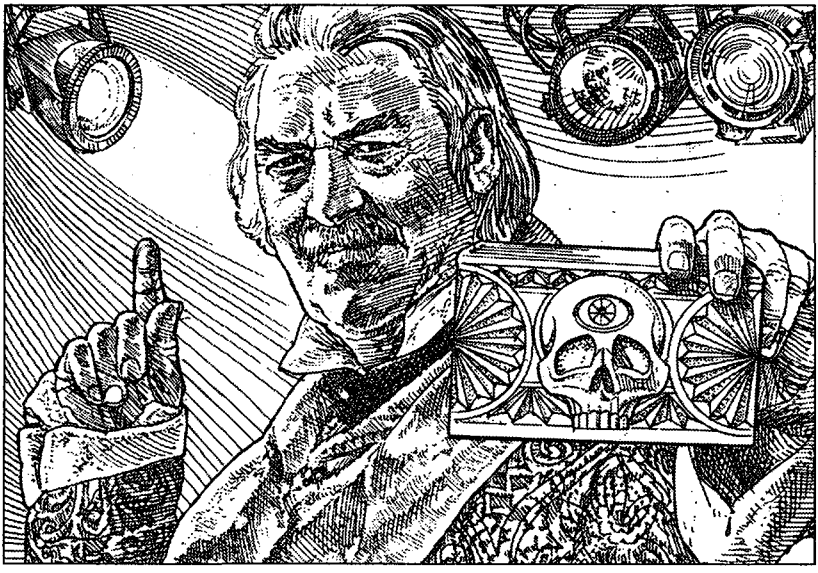
"I suppose you're right," Mr. Harbor grudged after a second. He straightened and looked me in the eye. "I suppose I owe you an apology along with a thank-you, son. I guess I've been a little judgmental where you're concerned." He lifted his voice a little and managed a half-ways smile. "I guess I also owe you for fixing my fender . . . the first time."

"Forget it. I did it for a friend." I glanced at Betty. She kept her eyes lowered towards the tabletop, smiling that demure little smile of hers. There was no reason to go into just how friendly she'd become after I'd bailed her out of that jam.

That's the whole deal with adults and parents. You never tell 'em more than they absolutely need to know.

You're really doing 'em a favor, man. They just can't take it. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Art by Allen Davis

Stone Boy Kicked That Blood Clot Around

by John Edward Ames

"Snakes only bite a doubter, my friends!" Daddy Mention proclaimed in a booming, basso profundo voice powerful enough to fill a canyon. "The evidence of things unseen is undeniable except to those with closed minds and jaded hearts! Even now I can feel the pressure of the invisible bearing down on all of us in this room."

From his vantage point behind and slightly to one side of the audience, Neal Maitland watched smartly coiffed heads nod eager agreement. Daddy's eyes, gray as morning frost, swept the room with the probing directness of search beams. Advancing age showed in his sagging jaw line, but his fluid, impulsive lips and urgent intensity commanded utmost attention.

"All of you know I have a legion of offended critics, a thousand baby chicks trying to peck me to death. They insist the dead are gone, period. Nothing but cosmic dust. As lost, to those of us still

©2008 by John Edward Ames

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

living, as if they had entered Jigoku, the Buddhist hell from which there is no redemption. But this cynical tribe is *wrong!* Smugly limited by their blind orthodoxy, the naysayers have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory."

Maitland tasted bile in his throat when a murmur of approval bubbled through the famous French Quarter salon on Burgundy Street. A group of perhaps a hundred or so very select guests were scattered about on high-backed divans and velvet hassocks. Maitland spotted plenty of Bond Street suits and black satin evening bags, with here and there a fox fur cape or silver-tip mink to remind any observers that this was not your typical low-budget tourist act.

A former English teacher (at several U.S. universities) and journalist, John Edward Ames has also authored some two dozen novels, many under pseudonyms and most of them Westerns. In 1995, his historical novel *The Unwritten Order* was a finalist for the Western Writers of America's Spur Award. Though he has lived in several states in the Midwest and West, Mr. Ames has now settled in New Orleans, a place whose flavor he's captured here. ¶

"Though few of us can put words to the feeling," Daddy Mention resumed, his huge bulk moving gracefully among the audience, "we all yearn for something transcendent, something that *proves* our existence is much more than the 'mere mechanical dance of atoms' my critics believe it to be."

With a dramatic flourish, Daddy removed an object from the folds of his jellaba, holding it out before him as he revolved slowly so all could see what he held in his short, spatulate fingers. The room went as silent as a courtroom before an important verdict. Maitland felt his upper lip curl into a sneer as he stared at the small birchwood box.

"I am *not* a magician!" Daddy roared out as if accused, his prominent throat muscles flexing into taut cords. "Magic is mere illusion, trickery, sleight-of-hand. Nor am I a psychic, for I make no predictions, bend no spoons, read no minds. Rather—I have found the way to *orenda*, a Native American word meaning power or medicine."

Wherever Daddy walked, Maitland made sure he was flatteringly illuminated by the soft, concealed spotlights Maitland controlled with a hand remote.

"Orenda," Daddy repeated forcefully, as if the sound itself could animate clay. "Some call it the Third Eye. Call it Cajun sassafras, for all I care. The point is that *orenda* is not a product of the mind or intellect. *Orenda* allows me to perceive the nonverbal truths of the soul or, if you prefer the term, psychic aura. The truth of *this,"*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he emphasized, again extending the small birchwood box toward the audience. "The deepest truths of all are felt whole, at once, not as separate words carved out by the mind."

Yeah, get into your riff, you slick old grifter, Maitland thought. *Half these fish are already gut-hooked.*

The anger of long-unexpressed resentment hammered in his temples. It was thanks to *his* hard work and risks that these rich, gullible simps swore "Daddy Mention"—whose real name was Bertrand Lagasse, a fugitive felon—was worlds apart from the tattooed and pierced junkies out on Jackson Square, reading tarot cards and working up star charts for the rubes. Daddy Mention's rare "exhibitions" were by invitation only, sent almost exclusively to the wealthy, and considered premier social events by the Garden District elite.

During the past year, even as New Orleans still reeled from Katrina, Daddy's syndicated AM radio program *The Third Eye* had become a huge hit, including the mother lode of advertising demographics, the twenty-to-thirty-year-olds. And his brand of fiery, charismatic, New Age spiritualism even lured thousands of his listeners to visit cash-starved New Orleans, earning praise from the Chamber of Commerce and prompting one wag to dub his home "the Lourdes of Louisiana."

During all the lean years, Maitland was down in the trenches doing the dirt work. And now that his hard work was finally paying off big dividends, that fat scut was treating him like one more lump of gravel on the launch pad.

"Snakes only bite a doubter," Daddy Mention repeated. Again he wagged the box in his hand. "Stone Boy kicked that blood clot around, and We-Ota-Wichasha was born—Blood-Clot Man. First Man, whose one heart beats in all of us here tonight!"

For a moment Daddy's eyes shifted toward a beautiful young woman seated by herself near the double doors leading into the foyer. She wore a wine-red crepe gown, accentuating eyes the soft blue of forget-me-nots and honey-blond bangs feathered over her forehead. The smile she sent Daddy conveyed the essence of adoring love and unpretentious grace. Maitland watched her toss her hair back with a little flip of her head, the carefully practiced movement causing him a flutter of loin heat.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Daddy resumed, nodding in her direction, "my wife Arlette. Look at her face, then look at mine. I present her as living proof that a man's reach should exceed his grasp."

Polite laughter rippled through the salon. Daddy set the little box on a pedestal table situated so all could clearly see it. Then he folded his massive arms over his chest and shook his head sadly, as if they'd missed his real point.

"We are granted *no* desires that cannot be satisfied, including the desire to remain in direct communication with our loved ones after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are physically dead. But first we must believe, and armed with our belief we must then have the courage to *act.*"

Daddy glanced toward Maitland, nodding slightly. Maitland thumbed a button on the remote, and one of the concealed spotlights seemed to bathe the little birchwood box in silvery radiance.

"Defeat!" Daddy repeated. "Spiritual defeat, the worst kind of surrender. And why do you surrender? Because you are not quite smart enough to truly be happy, not quite smart enough to discover the 'trick' to overcoming the eternal silence of the grave. So instead you opt for the spiritually neutered existence of the drones in the majority. And sadly, you lose the courage to believe, to *want,* to hear the messages the so-called dead send to me every day."

By now, everyone present sat riveted. Daddy Mention's accusatory words, his incisive and compelling tone, had lanced deep to the core of their need.

"And the greatest tragedy of all?" he demanded, pointing toward the box. "Simply this: At any time you *could* slough this mass-man spiritual defeatism as surely as a snake sloughs its old skin. A small, simple box just like that one could become, in a sense, a spiritual post-office box linking you to your departed loved ones."

Maitland glanced toward Arlette and caught her gazing back at him, not Daddy. Her face mirrored nothing the audience could read, but the faint shadow of a complicit smile touched her lips.

Maitland recalled their last tryst, a stolen hour of erotic acrobatics in a flea-pit motel. And he recalled the unexpected words she had vouchsafed in a whisper that tickled first his ear, then his spine. The memory gusted away, however, as Daddy's voice climbed an octave in his urgency and slapped Maitland back to the present. He watched his employer pick up the box again, lovingly, holding it as though it were a cherished relic.

"We-Ota-Wichasha," he repeated. "Blood-Clot Man. The key to the treasure—" he raised the birchwood box for emphasis—"is to continue the sacred circle of life, the circle that is complete but has no beginning or end. But to defeat death, you must act *before* death by making a choice."

Maitland felt his blood seem to flow backward when his employer suddenly pivoted to stare directly and deliberately at him; his probing gaze turned insectile, and his expressive lips formed a goading little one-sided smile.

"And choices," Daddy warned in closing, his voice grown ominously quiet, "can be sublime or lethal."

Neal Maitland steered his rattletrap Pontiac between stone gateposts topped by fluted urns. A bored guard waved him past the gatehouse, and Maitland parked on the slate cul-de-sac in front of a massive Greek Revival.

He followed a crushed oyster-shell footpath that led to a service

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entrance around back near the kitchen extension. The brittle light of late afternoon was starting to take on that mellow richness just before sunset. Even here, in the heart of the magnolia-scented Garden District, Maitland could whiff the necrotic hint that permeated New Orleans long before Katrina.

The service entrance, under the rear veranda, remained unlocked during the day. Maitland let himself in, trying to ignore the loss-of-gravity tickle that had been gathering in his stomach since yesterday, when Daddy Mention had blindsided him with that sudden, sly, accusing stare.

A narrow, oak-floored hallway, illuminated by bulbs in brass wall sconces, extended almost the full length of the house. Doors opened off both sides, and a doorless archway at the far end, hung with needlework curtains, led to Daddy Mention's private little Inner Sanctum. Maitland knew that Daddy, a creature of habit, would be relaxing there now, enjoying a glass of burgundy.

But he stopped well short of the study, spearing his fingers through his hair before rapping lightly on one of the side doors midway down the hall. It swung open immediately, and Arlette tugged him quickly over the threshold into a cramped storage room reeking of camphor.

They kissed with the furtive, body-melding hunger of illicit lovers forced to take their pleasure in broken doses.

"I'm getting scared, Neal," Arlette said when they came up for air. "I think he suspects about us."

"He doesn't know jack," Maitland insisted despite his own unease. "We've been careful. He's just got you spooked with all that 'third eye' doo-dah."

"It's not that. You don't know him like I do. I've been handling his legal matters for years now. Bertrand could follow anyone into a revolving door and come out ahead. You just be careful when you go see him."

The only light in the windowless room spilled from a naked bulb suspended from the ceiling on a string. But Arlette, just returned from some social function, still wore her hair in a braided coil at the nape; she looked stunning in pearls and a black knit dress that bared her shoulders. The thirty-year-old attorney had given up her practice in tax law when she married Daddy Mention and took over management of his financial empire.

"Don't worry," Maitland replied. "My motto is *Semper* Gumby—always flexible. Everything hinges on what he says at this meeting. I've crossed swords with him before about money. But this is his last chance. Speaking of which—you're *sure* about that . . . information you gave me?"

She nodded. "That's where it pays to know the law, cabana boy. In Louisiana no coroner's inquest or autopsy is required when someone under long-term doctor's care dies, unless something looks sus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

picious. An autopsy can be requested by the next of kin, but that's me. Dr. Charbonnet has been tending to Bertrand for nearly ten years and knows how weak he is. Nor is he the suspicious type."

Maitland rubbed the point of his chin, weighing each word. "But it must be any doctor's duty to look for something fishy?"

"I researched it thoroughly. Before any dead body is removed, the responding medical examiner makes a routine visual inspection. Poisons can leave visual clues like cyanosis, just as strangulation leaves an obvious ligature. But suffocation leaves no external clues. Just some tiny broken blood vessels that show only when the upper lip is cut and extended back during an autopsy. I'll simply forego the optional autopsy when Charbonnet comes out to certify death. It's all legal and quite common."

Maitland nodded. Personally, he would prefer the simplicity of a .45, a reliable knock-down gun that usually killed with one shot no matter where the bullet struck its victim. But given Daddy Mention's celebrity status, if he were murdered the law would be all over it like heat rash. Better that he die of "natural causes."

"Well, let's hope we won't have to risk it, cupcake," Maitland said, kissing her again. "That old bastard *owes* me. I worked out the original grift that made him what he is today. All he has to do is cut me in for a decent percentage of the gate. Then, once it's all down in legal ink, you can afford to tell him about us."

Her voice took on a scalpel edge at odds with her entreating gaze and the oval sweetness of her face. "You're hoping for a square deal from Bertrand? You'd have better luck trying to bite your own teeth."

"In that case, it's his funeral. We'll know in a few minutes."

"Be careful," she threw after him in an urgent whisper as he slipped out into the hallway again.

"Actually, Neal, I'm quite proud of you for finally standing up to me like this. Nowadays we are all trained to be cowards. Most have replaced their backbones with wishbones. But *you* have finally risen up from the steaming dung heap to proclaim your worth. Bravo! The man with the caviar face has finally cast off his pizza tastes."

Daddy Mention was negligently sprawled in the soft leather chair behind his desk. Fabrics in a sun-bleached palette covered the furnishings of his favorite room, with brocade drapes soft-lensing the last of the day's sunlight. The wall behind him featured a huge sandalwood carving of Ganesh, the Hindu god of success.

Maitland perched on one of the wide windowsills, trying unsuccessfully not to contrast all this luxury to his own rented room on Magazine Street, rendered functional and tasteless by mass-produced furnishings. Anger-warmth flushed his neck and face. All your life, this room accused him, you've been somebody's man, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tool of power but never powerful yourself.

But those days are over, he resolved again, feeling his will clench like a fist.

As if seizing his very thoughts, Daddy spoke up. "The gods have persecuted you since birth, is that it, Neal? So now you figure it's your turn to ladle off some of the cream?"

Feeling trapped by his employer's goading stare, Maitland averted his eyes. "Never mind the gods. What about a partnership arrangement?"

"A partnership?" Daddy's tone ridiculed the word. He gave a harsh bark of laughter before shrewdness seeped into his eyes. "The ass waggeth his ears. *I'm* the rainmaker. You're merely day labor, my friend, remember that."

"Yeah, *now* I'm day labor. But I was night labor before, remember? Back when *I* built up your entire phony rep."

Daddy gave a fluming snort. "Nothing ruins truth like stretching it."

"Then you tell me how I'm lying."

"Let's just say your memory has a penchant for melodramatic embroideries."

"No, let's just say you're so full of crap your feet are sliding! I was the one who broke into all those Uptown mansions and cars. It was me who planted the mics that gave you all the inside information you needed to snow them big time with your 'third eye.' Who pulled your bacon out of the fire when that prof from New York was on the verge of exposing your methods in the national media? Don't ever forget: When I met you, you were a two-bit palm reader working out of a cardboard stall."

Maitland pointed toward a shell-covered hutch in the corner behind Daddy. It contained a growing number of small birchwood boxes exactly like the one Daddy had displayed yesterday. Each box was labeled with the name of someone living or recently deceased, and each contained a lock of the person's hair, a speck of their dried blood, some nail clippings. When the right secret words were spoken over them, Daddy claimed, a spark of the human soul entered the box and did not die with its human body. The True Believers paid exorbitant fees so that Daddy could keep them in touch with their loved ones "Over There." He had them convinced he need only hold the box next to his heart to receive messages from the departed.

"And now?" Maitland continued, acid etching each syllable. "Now you're a 'soul keeper.' Running a profitable psychic message service between rich fools and the dead. 'I hear messages.' Yeah, and Stone Boy kicked a lot of *bullshit* around!"

Daddy's expressive lips twitched with amusement. "Much like a neutered dog, you just don't get it, do you? This is New Orleans, *cher!* Truth is whatever you want it to be." Daddy shrugged. "So that's what I sell—whatever the suckers want to hear. I am the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

greatest auctioneer of all, accepting bids on immortality. It's purely business, Neal. As for your impertinent demands . . ."

Daddy rolled the stem of his wineglass between thumb and forefinger as he studied the younger man with a gaze forged of distaste and forbearance.

" . . . I believe it was Dostoyevsky who defined man as 'a creature who walks on two legs and is ungrateful.' You don't live in my pocket. If you don't like the way you're treated, find the door. I can call Manpower and replace you in five minutes. You've become my hair shirt, Neal, and I'm tired of the chafing."

Maitland's muscles went warm and weak with anger. Daddy, unfazed, pressed quickly ahead, his tone yielding to his evident disgust at the sight before him.

"*Look* at you. Big, buff bad boy, shoulders broad as a yoke, pumps iron and jogs. But despite your superior abs and lats you'll *never* be the alpha male. And do you know why, pretty boy? Because all your big ideas are filtered through longing, not logic. You think that, because you're not a play-the-crowd pimp like me, you're somehow superior. But you're a worm, a scrag-end nothing."

Maitland steeled his muscles, rage accelerating his pulse so much he could feel it throbbing hotly in his palms.

"You lump of sewer slime," he said in a toneless voice, still numb from the barrage of insults.

"Why, Neal!" Daddy protested, resorting to the magisterial tone that always irked Maitland. He pointed his chin toward the hutch in the corner. "Don't you know it's rude to visit Rome and insult the Pope? I am caretaker of these human souls. Show some respect."

"So what you're telling me is, either I suck it up or I split?"

"The way you say. After all, I've employed you for, what, ten years now? Taught you many tricks of the trade and introduced you to high society. Yet you shamelessly tup my wife, eh, slyboots?"

The question sideswiped Maitland. Daddy's eyes puckered with satisfaction when the other man's face flushed brick red.

"Ah-hah! Here are casements flung open!" Daddy baited him with his smile. "Come now, Neal, we're both men of the world. I know that my little angel's halo is a strap-on model. And you've been loosening the strap."

Beyond the windows, day had bled into night. Maitland said nothing, only watching the ivory scimitar of moon visible through the live oaks.

Daddy's big nose wrinkled at the bridge when he laughed. "We seem to be 'at daggers drawn,' as the novelists say. Well, as to your grievance: Everyone is rattling litigation sabers these days. Why not just sue me, Neal? And as for my wife . . ."

Daddy spread his perfectly manicured hands in a gesture of Gallic tolerance. "Oh, she's a seraph-faced beauty, all right, and who could blame a young farmer's bull like you for mounting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her? Besides . . ."

He picked up a vial of nitroglycerin pills and rattled them. "With my ailing pump, I can't 'roger her roundly' as you can. But I know Arlette's impressive mind as well as you know her impressive body. It's true she has turned to you for the pleasures of the marital couch that I can no longer provide. However, she prefers men who can deal with a sommelier and quote Proust. You, in glaring contrast, are a muscle-bound schlemiel who chills red wine."

Maitland pushed away from the windowsill and headed toward the door. "I quit."

"Fine, good luck paddling your own canoe," Daddy called out cheerfully behind him. "But a deserter never sleeps—keep that in mind."

Maitland halted on the threshold and turned slowly around. "Meaning what?"

Daddy's gray gaze was soulless and unwavering. "Meaning I've left you in a dirty corner, and naturally you'll stew on it until you want revenge. But I warn you now, Neal: I have carefully preserved the evidence required to link you to the murder of Professor Barry Skinner. So let's not be too . . . precipitate, eh, in our vengeful actions? Such as any 'leakage' to the media about my methods?"

"Evidence? You're running a bluff."

"Am I? With your usual sloppiness, you took too long in disposing of the murder weapon. I switched forty-fives on you. The one you tossed off the GNO bridge was clean. The one I have tucked away is registered to you, and it's far too late to report it stolen."

Maitland saw Daddy slide his right hand into the top drawer of the desk, where he kept an old Webley revolver.

"Switched forty-fives?" Maitland repeated when he could trust his voice again. "You're telling me you'd . . . ?"

"Relax. Cop a plea and you're free in fifteen years." Daddy smiled and added: "My wife's an attorney, you know. I'm sure that's what she'd advise."

Maitland's voice hoarsened. "I saved everything you own when I killed him, you lowlife—"

"It's always bothered me, Neal," Daddy cut him off in a bored tone, "when big, tough men like you pour out their guts without shame. Go cry on *Oprah.*"

Maitland stood rooted in the doorway, visceral anger making him tremble like a rain-soaked kitten.

"Don't be too hard on yourself," Daddy suggested with false unction. "After all, they say the last true man of action was Napoleon. Good night, Neal, and goodbye."

When Maitland still hesitated, Daddy slid the desk drawer open a few more inches for emphasis. "I take it you're not bolted to the floor?"

Maitland left without saying another word. Even before he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reached his car, a calm sense of purpose had replaced his anger. He'd be back that very night. There was no gate sentry after dark, only the home-security system, and Arlette had already given him the code to disarm that.

It would be done her way now.

Daddy Mention had fallen asleep without turning back the bedding. He lay sprawled on his back atop a magenta quilt with a grapevine border. His usual nightcap of crème de cacao sat half finished on a nightstand beside the bed.

Maitland, gripping a pillow, stood over the sleeping man, noticing how ragged and uneven Daddy's breathing was. Arlette was right: Not only would this be easier than snuffing out a candle, but no red flags would go up when a man this old and ill died in his sleep.

A balcony door stood ajar, and a humid breeze nudged the curtains into motion. Moonwash seeped in through the slatted jalousies and splashed across Daddy's face. Maitland nudged him. "Lagasse?"

Daddy's eyelids quivered open. Still groggy with sleep fumes, he didn't at first register the husky whisper or the sight of his employee standing over him with a pillow at the ready. Maitland waited until a spark of panicked understanding gleamed in those atavistic eyes, and then he smothered that hateful face until the choking noises ceased.

"The will is going to sail through probate," Arlette predicted, keeping her voice just above a whisper. "Even with Daddy gone, I can unload Third Eye Enterprises for at least forty million. I'll spend a few weeks playing the proper widow, then we'll fly off to Vegas. So wipe that nervous frown off your face and quit pacing like a caged animal."

The two of them occupied a side parlor featuring an original Hotchkiss upright and slender-legged tables topped by Tiffany and Waterford crystal lamps. Maitland swept aside several fussy little pillows with lace ruffles and sat at the opposite end of the sofa from Arlette. He glanced toward a walnut staircase leading to the second floor.

"Then why are they taking so long up there?" he fretted.

"They're not. Now *quit* acting like the nervous perp in a Poe story. You're my bodyguard now, so just act detached and bored like a good macho."

"Easy for you to say. What if Daddy really left my gun with his lawyer—"

"I'm his lawyer, remember? I told you the gun story was pure bluff, he told me so himself. Keeping it would have made him an accessory to murder."

"Yeah, it would, wouldn't it?" Maitland said, feeling some of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weight lift from his chest. "And if—"

"Shush it," she warned in a whisper, glancing toward the stairs.

Hushed voices approached them as two men slowly descended. Maitland watched them, pausing on the feather edge of his next breath. Dr. Romer Charbonnet was well into his sixties, with watery blue eyes and rumpled white hair. Maitland didn't know the younger Asian man with him, but Arlette said he was the medical examiner. And Maitland feared a buttoned-down type like that needed only a tissue-paper pretext to order an autopsy.

"Arlette," Charbonnet said when he reached the bottom of the stairs. When he paused, studying the new widow from sympathetic eyes, Maitland felt his throat constricting. "Arlette, neither I nor Dr. Tran found anything that would contraindicate a natural death."

Point, set, match, Maitland exalted silently as the rest of the oppressive weight lifted from his chest.

Charbonnet spoke in a consoling voice. "Try to buck up. Daddy himself once told me the body is only an envelope for the spirit."

A sudden grin twisted Maitland's lips and he quickly turned his face away, biting his lower lip hard to keep from laughing.

"I assume you won't be requesting an autopsy, Mrs. Mention?" Dr. Tran added.

Tie it up with a bow, cupcake, Maitland urged his lover silently.

"Yes, there must be an autopsy," Arlette replied in a firm tone. "Earlier today I found ample grounds for suspicion of foul play."

Maitland felt a cold hand grip his heart, and each breath was labored. Arlette rose and crossed to a credenza along the nearest wall. He tracked her from a cross-shoulder glance, his mind a welter of confused thoughts. She reached behind some books and pulled out a clear plastic storage bag. Maitland tasted the corroded-pennies taste of fear when he saw the military model Colt .45 inside it.

"I think my husband was murdered," she said bluntly, staring at Maitland. "Not by this weapon, but by the man who owns it and killed Professor Barry Skinner with it—Neal Maitland. There's a letter with it that may implicate my husband in a serious crime, but we need to sift this matter to the bottom."

Fear gave way to white-hot anger when Maitland realized she'd used him for a cat's paw. Daddy had called his wife right. Why should she share a fortune with a schlemiel who chilled red wine?

"You'll sift worms in hell, you slut," Maitland assured her as he sprang to his feet. "The cops aren't getting that gun. I snuffed Daddy's wick, you think I'm afraid to snuff yours?"

It meant killing the dumbfounded doctors, too, but Maitland would rather live on the dodge than be caged in prison. And Murder One was not a bailable offense, so he had to run now. His hand curled toward the chamois armpit holster under his jacket.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

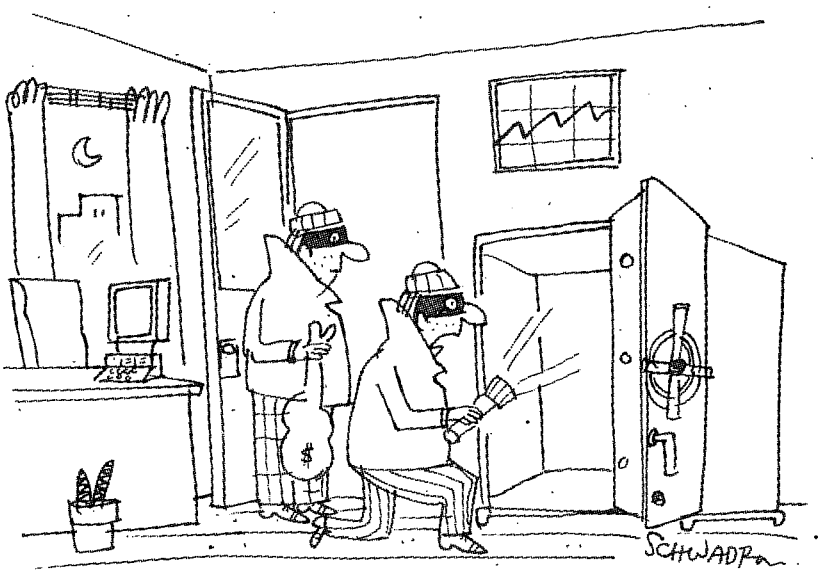
He lunged toward Arlette as he drew the weapon.

"Freeze, Maitland, or you'll be the sorriest son of a bitch in sixteen states!"

Two cops in summer-weight suits had materialized in the open French windows. The unblinking eyes of two 9mm gun barrels were pointed center of mass on Maitland. A third cop was recording every incriminating word and action with a camcorder. Maitland wisely dropped his weapon on the sofa.

"You were right, Mrs. Mention," one of the cops told Arlette as another cuffed and patted down Maitland. "Wanting us to see his behavior when you requested an autopsy was a stroke of genius. His remark just now about killing Daddy was an admission, not a legal confession. But it's damning, and even if he's got a bulletproof alibi for the night Skinner was murdered, a match between his gun and the slug that killed Skinner will send him over."

Maitland opened his mouth to accuse her, but swallowed the sentence without speaking. Arlette had played him like a piano, never meeting him in public, and no one was going to believe him. Especially not the overworked public defender he'd be forced to use. Daddy's booming voice from yesterday mocked Maitland as he was led to captivity: *Cop a plea and you're free in fifteen years. My wife's an attorney, you know. I'm sure that's what she'd advise.* ●



"Too late. The CEO got here first!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Run for Justice

by Brendan DuBois

The meeting was brief and to the point, and took place in the offices of one Tyler Buchanan along pricey Newbury Street in Boston. I shook his hand as I was ushered in, and took a chair in front of his wide wooden desk. He was in that midpoint between forty and sixty, with black hair cut short and a lean expression to his tanned face that announced that he could look into the hearts of fools, so don't waste your time trying to pull anything over on him.

As well known for his stand-alone thriller novels as for his series mysteries, Brendan DuBois uses a broad brush, referencing big events, historical and political, in most of his work. In January '08, Five Star released *Final Winter*, a DuBois novel set just after the September 11th attacks. This month: a tale starring a female Iraq War vet who's back in the U.S. and working as a P.I.

He sat down and said, "Miss Blair, I'd like to hire you for the foreseeable future, to serve as a bodyguard for my daughter Kimberly. A month to start, with an option to renew after that."

The windows in his office had a nice view of the Public Gardens, and the bookshelves looked like they were filled with real leather-bound books and not an impressive collection of Massachusetts state statutes or some nonsense to make uneducated visitors think the host was a well-educated reader.

I said, "Bodyguard work is not really my expertise, Mr. Buchanan."

From a drawer in his desk, he pulled out a file folder, opened it up, and put on a pair of reading glasses. He said, "Miss Carrie Blair. Former U.S. Army sergeant in the Army Reserves, and New Hampshire state trooper, now sole owner and employee of Blair Investigative Services. Honorably discharged from the service after being wounded in action. Have now been on your own for three years. A small client list—insurance companies, finance companies, and homeowners associations—but nothing too big." He looked up from his reading. "So why do you find bodyguard work unappealing?"

I crossed my legs. I had on a sensible black pantsuit, sensible white blouse, and sensible shoes, to go along with what I hoped would seem to be a sensible attitude. So the guy had a file on me.

©2008 by Brendan DuBois

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Big deal. A few minutes on the Internet and a ten-cent Manila folder later, I could have a file on almost anyone in the United States.

"Because it's brainless work," I said. "And based on distrust. Brainless because except for a handful of celebrities or politicians, nobody really needs a bodyguard. And based on distrust, because usually, especially in the case of a parent, being asked to be a bodyguard for a daughter means being a glorified babysitter. It means watching her and her pals, making sure she doesn't get drunk, or get high, or have photos taken of her while she isn't wearing any panties. Not a very good use of my time, and an expensive bill for what's really nanny work."

"Trust me, it's not nanny work," he said. "And the pay will be of a magnitude better than your normal rate."

I was too polite to say that I wouldn't trust Tyler Buchanan to tell me it wasn't raining, even though the view from his office was sunny. He was one of those shadowy movers and shakers of Boston, a place where the three great pastimes are sports, politics, and revenge. He was a real-estate developer who also specialized in raising funds for his pet projects, and in helping spread nasty gossip about those pet projects of his competitors that he despised.

"All right," I said. "You've got my interest. Go on."

And then, something magical happened. Not magical in the way of rainbows and unicorns and chocolate sundaes; magical in the way of seeing someone's carefully polished image slip away, and discovering what was underneath. And what I saw was a troubled dad.

Buchanan swallowed audibly and folded his hands together, and said in a low voice, "Kimberly is nineteen years old. A sophomore at B.C. Several months ago, she was out with some friends at a bar. Something was slipped into her drink that made her woozy and unstable. She was removed from the bar, and raped."

I instantly regretted my earlier smart-ass attitude. "Mr. Buchanan, I'm terribly sorry to hear that."

He raised a hand, shook his head briefly. "It . . . it went as well as could be expected, I suppose. She was able to identify her attacker, but due to some cunning work on his attorney's part, he was only convicted of assault. He's now serving an eighteen-month sentence at a minimum-security prison out in the Berkshires. And Kimberly . . . physically, she's fine. It . . . it wasn't as brutal as these things can be. But emotionally . . ."

Then he stopped, paused, and it was like being in London, standing before Big Ben, waiting for the clock tower to chime . . . and hearing nothing. I folded my hands, waited with him. He coughed and wiped at his eyes and said, "Before the attack, Kimberly was strong, smart, athletic. She could go anywhere and do anything. In fact, she was planning a month-long hike this summer along the Appalachian Trail . . . but now. Miss Blair, she's dropped out of school. She's living at a condo that we own in the Back Bay. And for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her to step out and get a cup of coffee and that morning's *Boston Globe* . . . that's a victory. Frankly, she's terrified of being outside."

"I can understand. But you said her attacker is serving time . . . and that you wanted a bodyguard . . ."

He cleared his throat. "Then I probably misspoke. What I want is someone to be with her to give her peace of mind, that nothing will happen to her again. To help ease her out of the condo so she can slowly recover some sort of useful life. She can't hide in that condo forever."

I said, "Please excuse me for saying this . . . but I think this is more a job for a therapist than someone like me."

"She is seeing a therapist," he said. "Evenings, twice a week. But I believe . . . and so does her therapist . . . that getting her out of the condo will help her recovery. Do you see what we mean?"

"True," I said. "But I can't do a 24/7 job alone. It'd be exhausting after three days."

Buchanan made a dismissive motion with his right hand. "You're absolutely right. On the weekends, she's with me and her mother. During the evening and off hours, the security at her condo is the best in Boston. But for eight hours a day, I would ask you to be with her . . . to take her out, to do things, to show her that she doesn't have to live in fear for the rest of her life. Miss Blair, will you do it?"

It didn't take me long to think it through, though I suppose, in hindsight, it should have. My client list was pretty thin and although I was doing all right, I wasn't making enough money to sock some away for an IRA, and my current medical plan would only kick in to pay for amputations and leech applications. But there was more than money driving this. I've got a kid sister, Donna, living up in Maine, and the thought of anyone doing something bad to her, like what happened to Kimberly Buchanan, made my fingers itch to be around somebody's throat.

"Deal, Mr. Buchanan," I said. "You have a deal."

And the smile I received in return was about the only genuine item in the office.

And so the next day, I met Kimberly Buchanan, age nineteen, and currently a student on leave from Boston College. The condo she was living in was in Back Bay, one of the pricier neighborhoods in Boston, and her father had told the truth: Security was pretty good. From the outside you went into a small, glassed-in lobby, where a guy sat behind a waist-high desk with a surveillance camera mounted on the far wall. The guy had a good attitude, too. There are security guards and then there are security guards. The bad ones make just a bit over minimum wage and tend to skate over their responsibilities. The good ones let the jokes about rent-a-cops roll off their backs, and stare right at you as you come into their range of view.

This uniformed guard—a Hispanic guy with the shoulders and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

upper arms of a football player—looked at me and said, "You've got an appointment?"

"Yes," I said. "The name is Carrie Blair. I'm here to see Kimberly Buchanan, in unit fourteen."

His expression didn't change. "Identification, please?"

I pulled my driver's license from my purse, passed it over onto the counter. He looked at the photo and back at me, and then held out a clipboard. "Sign here, please."

I signed and he pressed a switch under the counter. An elevator door slid open and he said, "One floor up. Unit fourteen. I'll announce you."

"Thanks," I said, and in a manner of seconds, I was at the door. The hallway outside was nicely carpeted, with tables on each end that had vases holding what looked to be fresh flowers.

I pushed the buzzer, waited. A voice from the other side: "Carrie? Carrie Blair?"

"That's right," I said.

The voice came back, "Could you step back a bit . . . and put your ID up to the peephole?"

"Sure," I said, doing just that, and in a few seconds there were some clicks and clacks as the door was unlocked and opened up. A woman about my height but thirty pounds lighter looked at me, smiling. She had on dark blue sweatpants and a sweatshirt. She was barefoot. Her brown hair was pulled back in a simple ponytail and her face, though cheerful, was quite puffy, as if she had been weeping by herself for months.

"So you're my bodyguard," she said, her voice firm but quiet.

I walked into the condo unit and said, "That's what your father hired me for. What do you think?"

She shrugged, closed the door behind me, and efficiently relocked the three locks. I took a moment to look around. We were in a small entryway that led into a well-lit kitchen and large living room. I walked into the living room and checked the windows. Locked, of course, though being up this high, it would take someone with ropes descending from the roof to have the ability to break in. Small bathroom and tidy bedroom, and that was the tour of the place. It looked well built, secure; if the security guards on the other shifts were as sharp as the one on duty now, she was in a good place. I went back out to see her and she said, "Coffee? Tea? Orange juice?"

"Juice would be nice," I said, as I sat down on the wide leather couch, putting my purse on the floor by my feet. A plasma television set hanging on the wall was showing a black-and-white film from the 1930s, it looked like, starring Spencer Tracy. Kimberly came in, carrying a small glass with orange juice, and I took it and said, "Thanks," and took a sip. She took a nearby chair, looked over, and said, "Well, what do we do now?"

"Excuse me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She shook her head, though she kept her smile. "You're my bodyguard. What do we do?"

I shrugged. "Whatever you want to do is fine by me."

That made her pause for a moment. "I don't understand."

"Don't understand what?"

"I mean . . . Father said when he hired you, that you were going to take me places. Get me outside. That sort of thing."

I took another sip of the orange juice. Nice and cold and tart. I said, "Yeah, he said that to me, too. And you know what? I don't care what he wants. What do *you* want to do today?"

She rubbed her hands, as if they were cold. "Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"I . . . I just want to hang, that's all. There's a Spencer Tracy marathon on one of the cable stations." She pointed to the TV. "I . . . I'd like to see that, if that's okay."

I smiled at her. "Your dad's paying the freight, Kimberly, but this is your place. If that's what you want to do, that's what we'll do."

She nodded, smiled a bit wider, and then joined me on the couch.

I left at five P.M. that day, after having a nice pasta lunch, sent up from an Italian place around the corner. I made sure to answer the door myself. Later, the pasta made her sleepy, for she yawned a couple of times as we were watching *Captains Courageous.* I got off the couch and let her stretch out, and placed a red wool blanket over her. She dozed for about an hour, and once, she started dreaming. I don't know what it was, but she trembled and breathed in hard, long pants, as if she was running a road race in her sleep, and when I went over to wake her up, she moaned and rolled over, and the panting and trembling stopped.

At the door, as I left, she said, "So . . . you'll be here tomorrow?"

"Yep. Unless your dad stops paying me."

She smiled. "He won't."

The next day, there was an Elizabeth Taylor marathon, and this time, I dozed on the couch. On the third day, after we ate lunch—takeout seafood, a bit better than pasta—she looked at me and said, "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure. Ask away."

"Do you . . . I mean, you're a private investigator. Right?"

"That's what it says on my tax return."

"So you're licensed."

"Here and in New Hampshire."

"Do you . . . I mean, do you carry a gun?"

"I'm licensed to," I said.

"So you have it with you, right now."

I said, "Yes, I do."

"Where is it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In my purse."

She thought for a second. "Suppose . . . suppose someone breaks down the door, tries to get in?"

"Then I'll get it."

"Can you get there in time?"

I looked to my leather purse, on the coffee table, and then to the door. "Kimberly . . . trust me. First of all, you've got pretty damned good security downstairs. And if there's a disturbance at the door, I can get to my purse and pistol within seconds."

She nodded at that and said, almost shyly, "Can I see it?"

"My pistol?"

Kimberly nodded.

I felt like sighing, but what the hell. It would probably make her feel a bit better, and after what she had been put through, why not? I went over to the coffee table, picked up my purse, and in a second, had my pistol in my hand, a nice 9mm Smith & Wesson. She gasped at how quickly it all happened.

"What the . . . where did that come from?"

I held up the purse, showed it to her. "Special design. Made like one of those old-fashioned fur mufflers fashionable young ladies used to use to warm their hands." I pointed out the gap in the middle of the purse. "Pistol's hidden in there. Don't have to fumble with a purse clasp or cover."

"Sweet," she said, and she came over and, biting her lower lip, said, "Could I . . . would you mind . . . if I held it?"

Another second or two pause on my end, and I said, "Sure. Hold on."

I put my purse back on the coffee table, held the pistol, and pressed the side switch to release the twelve-shot magazine. Out it popped in my hand, and then I worked the action, to make sure the chamber was clear. And it was. Safe and unloaded, I passed it over to her.

She held it gingerly, as if it were a live hand grenade, and turned it over in her hand. "It's so heavy . . . I've never held a gun before in my life."

I just watched her.

Around and around, she turned it. "How does it work?"

"Excuse me?"

"The gun, how does it work? Do you just pull the trigger? Is that it?"

So I went into a ten-minute description of the clip, the slide, the safety, and all that, and she just nodded at the right places, being polite, I guess, but the pistol never left her hands.

"How long have you known how to fire a gun?" she asked.

"Since I was younger than you," I said. "Grew up on a dairy farm, up near the Vermont border. Started off with a twenty-two rifle as a kid . . . you get used to it."

She held it still for a moment, then pointed it out the window, her hands shaking a bit. "I don't think I could ever get used to it. All that power locked away in here . . . the power to kill, the power to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

injure, the power to destroy. . . . *Brrr.* Here, take it back."

Kimberly held it out to me. "I'm glad you know how to use it. It scares the crap out of me."

I took my Smith & Wesson back, replaced the magazine, and put it back into my purse. "It's just a tool, that's all. If you know how to use it."

She looked at me, went back to the kitchen, stopped, and then turned. "Carrie?"

"Yes?"

"You . . . you want to go outside? For a quick walk?"

I grabbed my purse. "Absolutely."

So outside we went, and Kimberly kept close to me as we stepped out onto the brick sidewalk. I let her set the pace and we walked a couple of blocks in the late spring sunshine, passing students and tourists and other rambling types out in the Back Bay of Boston. At a Starbucks we got the usual overpriced and over-syllabled drink and sat on a park bench to watch the world go by.

She took a sip of her brew and sighed and said, "Thanks."

"For what?"

"For helping me get out here. Sunshine feels nice."

"I'm sure it does."

She sat next to me for a few more minutes, and then she said, "You know . . . back there . . . what I was thinking about, when I was holding your pistol?"

"No, what's that?"

"I was thinking of a professor of mine . . . took a class from her last semester, in sociology. One day she went off on a tangent about phallic symbols and all that, and pointed out that most monuments, church steeples, and missiles are all of the same shape. Even rifles and pistols . . . just glorified phallic symbols. I laughed at her back then. Now . . . I don't know."

I held my own brew in my hands. "Just remember what Freud said."

"What's that?"

"Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar . . . and sometimes a pistol is just a pistol."

That made her laugh and she said, "You know . . . I was thinking of something else, with that pistol. Something else small and insignificant, something that belonged to that man who attacked me . . . how that little thing could cause so much hate, so much destruction."

I nodded and wasn't sure what else to say. Being a bodyguard was one thing, but being her confidante . . . She saved the moment and said, "Come on. Let's take a walk to the Common and see what's going on."

That weekend, at home in a small town across the border in New

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hampshire, I got a quick phone call from Kimberly's father: "I don't know what you're doing, but thanks," he said. "She's . . . changing. She tells me she's been outside a couple of times, and that she's getting some of her confidence back. That's wonderful."

"Glad to hear it," I said.

"Look, I know it's early . . . but would you like to commit for another month? Will you?"

And against my better judgment, I agreed.

About two weeks into my new job, Kimberly said, "Tomorrow . . . I'd like to go running tomorrow."

"Sure," I said, and the next day I showed up with a small black duffel bag with my running gear. Nothing fancy, just shorts, socks, sneakers, a U.S. Army T-shirt, and a jogging bra to keep my girls under control. I also had a fanny pack in which I zippered my wallet, ID, and my Smith & Wesson. As I did some stretching exercises in her condo, she stared at the scar tissue on my right leg.

"What happened there?" she asked.

"Shrapnel."

"Really? What happened?"

An old story, but she wanted to hear it. "I was with a convoy that got hit by an IED. I bailed out of my Humvee, tried to grab some of the injured, drag them out of harm's way, and then a second IED hit."

"God," she said. "Were you scared?"

I stood up, breathing just a bit harder. "Nearly wet myself from fear, but I did my job. What do you expect?"

She seemed to want to apologize but instead she surprised me and said, "It looks good on you."

Well, that was a surprise. "Excuse me?"

"I said, the scar looks good on you." She came closer to me, dressed in black sweatpants and a baggy gray sweatshirt. "It makes . . . it makes you look tough. Like a tough woman who won't take crap from anyone, who can defend herself, who . . . who guys wouldn't want to try to mess with. Or to spike her drink . . ."

Her eyes filled up. "Let's . . . let's go, okay?"

A nice warm day. We took our time, running along the Charles River, near Storrow Drive, where commuters were racing in and out of the driving nightmare that is Boston. Even with the traffic the air seemed okay, and it was nice to see the small sailboats out on the Charles, and the other people running along with us. I let her set the pace and kept up with her with no problem, loping along. It pleased me to see a wide smile slowly develop on her face as we made our way.

"Oh God, I can't tell you how much I've missed this," she said, turning her head to me, face aglow. "This is great. This is really great."

"I'm glad to hear that," I said. "But let's not push it, okay? Why

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't we take a break up at those park benches."

"Sure," she said.

So we slowed down some and I wiped at my face, feeling good, the nice glow of a workout, the tingle in my muscles. I just walked about in a circle, taking my time, and saw Kimberly walking over to a stone water fountain, by a park bench with a couple of guys sitting, their legs stretched out, sunning themselves. She bent down and took a drink, holding her ponytail back with one hand. I bent down and did a couple more stretches, and then stood up and—

She was gone.

Just like that.

Some bodyguard.

I raced over to the water fountain, heart thumping, wondering what in God's name had happened to her, and near the fountain was a little stand of pine trees, and there was a shape there, by one of the tree trunks. She was curled up on one side, holding herself tight, tears just rolling down her cheeks.

I knelt down and stroked her hair and said, "Shhh, Kimberly . . . what's wrong? What happened?"

She coughed and snot was running out of her nose. "They . . . those . . . the two guys . . . by the water fountain . . ."

I looked back and saw them again. Two guys in T-shirts and jeans, legs stretched out, watching the world go by. "What happened? What did they do to you?"

"They . . . they teased me . . . Said I was overdressed . . . said I should run with less clothes on . . . so they could get a show . . ."

As warm as I had been earlier, after our run, I was now chilled right through. I stroked her hair and said, "Hush, don't worry. You stay right here . . . give me a second, and then we'll go back home. Okay?"

"You'll be right back?"

"Promise," I said. "Here, sit up . . . catch your breath."

I got her up from the ground and let her sit back against the tree trunk. I patted her cheek and gave her a good big-sister smile, and said, "I'll be right back. Okay? Just stay right here and I'll be right back."

She nodded, and I stood up and walked over to the water fountain and the park bench with the two men.

I ignored them and went to the water fountain, bent over, and got a drink. The fountain had a good spray, which worked to my advantage, for I swung my torso around so some of the cold water splattered against my chest. The usual response of female flesh being struck by cold water happened, and I stood up and made sure the two men on the park bench got an eyeful.

The guys—early twenties, it looked like—were sitting, legs stretched out, both drinking from bottles concealed in paper bags.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The one on the left nudged his partner, and they both leered at me.

"Oh, honey," the second one said. "What a show! It must be some nipply out!"

The two of them laughed at that and I smiled and said, "Wanna closer look?"

Their eyes lit up, like bad boys who'd been told they'd have no presents under the tree, yet on December twenty-fifth had woken up with new bicycles with bows wrapped around them.

"Sure!" the first one said, and the two of them leaned forward as I strutted over to them and—

The first one was closer, so I got him with the flat of my hand. Punching out like a berserk traffic cop, I smashed his nose back into his head. He howled and brought his hands up to the bloody mess that was his nose, and while his friend looked on, I saw my spot and with a clenched fist, punched him in the throat. He literally fell backwards over the park bench, gurgling, wheezing, clutching his neck. I went back to number one, to see if he was going to give me any trouble, but he was sitting up against the bottom of the bench, trying to get a handkerchief up to the blood.

I stepped back, tried to ease my breathing. Kimberly was standing there, wide-eyed, hand up to her open mouth. I looked at her and said, "Let's go home, okay?"

She nodded. "Okay."

At her condo the aftereffects kicked in, and my right hand became swollen and achy. Kimberly made an ice pack and we sat on the couch. I had a Sam Adams beer and she had a glass of lemonade.

"That . . . was something else."

"Okay," I said.

"I mean . . . you didn't even hesitate. It was like you had in your mind what you were going to do, the moment you left me . . . no hesitation."

I moved my hand some. I was dripping water on the leather sofa. She went on.

"I had a philosophy professor, last year. He said something I agreed with at the time. That violence never solved anything. That brute force was to be avoided at all times. That the world's problems could be solved if men and women just came together, in good faith, and resolved their differences peacefully. He was very persuasive."

"Sounds like a hell of a professor," I said.

She shook her head. "I agreed with him back then. But today? What crap. How do you resolve differences with guys who look at you and say, Nice bod, sweetheart, why are you hiding it, why don't you strip and give us a show? Hmm? Then there's you. No negotiation. No trying to get to the root cause of why someone's being a jerk. No. You deal with it. You handle it."

I shifted the ice pack some. My hand was feeling better. "Don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make a big deal of it, Kimberly. Okay?"

She shook her head again. "Okay. Maybe not a big deal. But you know what? I learned more about life in the last half-hour than the whole previous year at school. And all from you, Carrie. All from you."

I didn't know what to say. I had been hired as a bodyguard, and now I had become a teacher.

Wasn't sure whether I could put that on my billing statement or not.

For the next couple of weeks, I set into a kind of routine with Kimberly. I drove in from New Hampshire each weekday morning and spent the day with her. While some days we just hung out in her condo—playing cribbage, watching old movies on the big-screen television, and talking about my military service—more and more often, we'd go out for runs. The length of these runs increased from day to day, sometimes along the paths by Storrow Drive, sometimes on the Cambridge side of the Charles, and up to Boston Common. As we ran I kept both her and our surroundings in view. Every now and then some guy would check us out—and believe me, I'm under no illusions, I knew they were checking her out—and she seemed to ignore them. I was happy with that. I was also under no illusions about what I was doing, or what her unseen therapist was doing, but I was glad to see that on the surface, at least, Kimberly was emerging from her dark hole. So I ran with my trusted fanny pack bouncing along, while my client kept up at my side.

One evening, after a fine Italian meal that was once again take-out—and I was thankful that we weren't dependent on my cooking skills—she looked at me and poured herself a glass of wine. I raised an eyebrow and she said, "Going to tell Daddy?"

"You're underage," I said. "But this is your place. You can do what you like."

"I'm my father's daughter," she said wryly. "I do what I want."

"Goody for you," I said. "Doing what you like."

She sipped from her wineglass and sighed. "You'd think. But funny how one choice, one decision, one drink, can change it all. Stepping out before finals, going to a bar that everyone knows doesn't check IDs that often . . . and getting a drink. That's it. One drink. Then meet up with an older guy named Ralph McKenzie, chat him up, and he slips something in the drink . . . I'm woozy, light-headed . . . and it happens. Taken back to his place . . . and he does his thing . . . simple, right? One bar, one drink, one guy. And now you're a different person . . . a crime statistic . . . not the simple college student with dreams and ambitions. Same body, but the spirit and mind . . . so different."

I decided to have another glass of wine. I didn't know what to say. So she said, "But that wasn't the worst. You know? The whole attack . . . I was out of it most of the time . . . and later . . . the detec-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tives and the ER people were kind and smart and did everything right . . . but it was the trial. That was the worst."

"I see," I said.

"Yeah . . . the trial. And a tanned, fit defense attorney did his job. And that's what really hurt. You see, you could make an excuse for the bastard's slug client . . . he was born twisted, he had dark desires, he had to do what he had to do. But his attorney? He chose to do what he did. To defend a rapist. A man who hated women. And he chose to put me on the stand, to ask leading questions, to raise doubt in the minds of the jurors. Oh, he couldn't ask direct questions about my sex life . . . that's out of bounds. But he did his smarmy job quite well. About my drinking habits, dating habits, social habits. My attacker is serving time for assault. Not rape. And he'll be out in less than two years. So there you go."

"Not much in the way of justice," I said.

"Nope," she said. "Not much. Poor Father. You know who he is and what he does. So proud of being able to be a mover and a shaker. He thinks, he plans for every eventuality. That's why he's so good at what he does. If he meets someone for a business meeting, he already knows the guy's credit history, his personal life, and his Internet habits. Poor guy loses before the meeting even begins. But this one thing about me, he couldn't move or shake. So his only daughter gets raped, the rapist gets less than two years, and the rapist's defense attorney gets a nice payday and the publicity of defending someone who hurt Tyler Buchanan. It was the Commonwealth's job to make everything right, and they weren't up to my dad's skills."

Another deep swallow of wine, and she cocked her head and looked at me. "Carrie . . ."

"Yes?"

"Do me a favor?"

"Depends," I said.

That made her laugh. "Good answer. All right, the favor is . . . will you spend the night?"

That was a request I hadn't seen coming. "Well . . . is everything all right?"

"Pretty broad question," she said. "But if you're asking if I'm scared of anything more than the usual, no, that's not the case. It's just that . . . well, you've had some wine, it's getting late, and one of the cable stations is playing *Lawrence of Arabia* later on tonight. One of my favorite movies. How does it sound?"

I thought for just a moment, and then said, "Sure. Why not?"

Later, I realized I should have thought more before saying yes.

The couch folded out to a bed that was more comfortable than my bed back home. After saying good night to me at her bedroom, she called out as I headed to the living room: "Carrie?"

"Yes?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Justice . . . you said something about justice earlier on. What does it mean to you, then?"

By now the light to her room was off, so I could only make out her dim shape, lying in the bed. "Justice . . . I don't know," I said. "Sometimes it's just a matter of timing."

"How's that?"

I hesitated, not wanting to say anything, but I went on. "Timing . . . The day I got wounded was like any other day . . . Like I said, the first IED hit, and I bailed out to help where I could. There was another MP with me . . . a reservist named Stoddard. World-class marathoner. He was in front of me when the second IED hit, and he blocked most of the blast. I got one leg torn up. He lost both legs above the knees. No more marathons for Mr. Stoddard. Is there justice in that? If I had been quicker than him getting out of the Humvee, I'd be without two legs and he'd still be running, fulfilling his dream. So is there justice in that?"

"I don't know," she said.

"And neither do I," I said, and went to my bed for the night.

I woke up with a start, with Kimberly kneeling next to me.

"Carrie?"

I yawned, rubbed at my face. "Yeah? What is it?"

"I know it's early, real early, but would you like to go for a run? Before breakfast?"

Not particularly, I thought. It still looked dark outside and having left the army, early morning runs were no longer in my routine. But there was eagerness in her voice and I didn't want to disappoint her, so I yawned again and said, "Okay. A run it is."

So I got up and dressed in my running gear and trusty fanny pack, and said, "Where to today?"

"The Common," she said. "I want to head over to the Boston Common."

"Sure." And we left her condo and headed out to the cool morning air of Boston, and after that morning's run, I never saw her again.

We walked briskly along the already crowded streets of Boston, off to the Common. While we were waiting for a light to change at the crosswalk, Kimberly leaned over to me and said, "What time is it, Carrie?"

"Almost six-thirty," I said, checking my watch.

"Thanks," she said. "And . . . thanks for spending the night. I enjoyed it."

And, in a small way, so had I. "Me, too. Maybe I'll do it again sometime."

She surprised me with a quick shake of the head. "No . . . I don't think so. But I loved talking to you, and I loved what you said. About justice. And timing."

"Hunh?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Around us, people started to move, as the light changed. I joined her as we reached the Boston Common, and then we broke into our run. It was slightly overcast, and instead of running side by side, sometimes Kimberly would run just a bit ahead of me, as if she was determined to lead the way this time. My head was still fuzzy from no caffeine, being up so early, and wondering what her little comments meant, when we came to a part of the Common where some park work was being done. There were piles of lumber and lengths of PVC pipe. Boston being Boston, this particular park work was scheduled to have been completed three years earlier.

We kept on running and then Kimberly really broke free ahead of me, and I tried to keep up, just as she seemed to stumble next to a pile of construction debris.

Kimberly went to her knees, bent over. I ran up to her, stopped, breathing hard.

"Kimberly, you okay? What's up?"

She looked up at me, said, "Sorry," and with a length of PVC pipe in her hands, nearly drove it through my forehead.

I fell backwards, stunned, little flashes of light going on behind my eyes, and there was another blow, and then another, and I held up a hand and she hit that as well. I tried to shout out, tried to yell, and as I rolled away she hit me again on the back, on the ribs, until I collapsed and felt her hands on me, on my back, on my ribs, on my—

Fanny pack.

She took my fanny pack away.

I lifted my head. Something wet was streaming down my forehead. I wiped at it, saw my blood, tried to get up, fell, and then tried to get up again, and made it this time.

Kimberly was running up the pathway, but my fanny pack wasn't in her hand.

She didn't need it.

For she had my pistol.

I stumbled, cursed, and went after her, and damn it to hell, I didn't have to go too far.

She ran to a part of the park where two other paths intersected, near a stand of oak trees, and I heard her yell out, the pistol in her hands, and then there was a male jogger in front of her, hands held up in front of him, backpedaling away, the pleading tone in his voice distinct even at this distance, and—

The sound of the gunfire was loud, fast, and by the time I got to her, she was standing over the dead man, my pistol in her hands, the slide of the action all the way back, indicating that all twelve rounds had been fired. Her face was red, and she was shouting down at the man, "Remember me? Remember me? Remember me?"

I got behind her and gingerly took the pistol out of her hands, as the sirens started wailing in the distance. I looked down at the dead

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man. I didn't know him, but he had on good running gear, some flashy jewelry about his neck and wrists, and his skin was quite tanned.

Like the high-priced, powerful, and successful defense attorney he had once been.

A month later, back in the same office where this had all begun. Every now and then, a headache would come back, but I was doing all right.

All things considered.

Tyler Buchanan looked about the same, too, though there was a bit of a twinkle about his eyes that I hadn't seen the first time around, and as I sat down and he sat down, I got right to it, as I placed my purse on the floor.

"Kimberly all right?"

He nodded crisply. "Still in a mental-healthcare facility, being monitored. Any court date is still out on the horizon."

I said, "It'll never happen, will it? A trial, that is."

He kept quiet.

"When she was the victim, you couldn't do much," I said. "Everything was in the hands of the Commonwealth and her attacker's defense attorney. They had the upper hand. Not you. But now it's changed. Kimberly is accused of killing that man's defense attorney, and she's a defendant. With the best defense attorneys and psychiatrists that Daddy's money can buy. You and everyone else in your corner will just state that she was a poor college girl, overwhelmed by events, who had a brief psychotic episode."

His face was bland, but there was still that twinkle about his eyes. "So you're in the driver's seat," I went on. "Which you like. Which means there will be pleadings, and motions, and evaluations, but eventually, Kimberly will be let loose, to go back to school, maybe even hike the Appalachian Trail. Because she and you will have shown Boston and the world that you can't go against the Buchanans and win."

He said, "Your opinion, that's all."

I cocked my head. "Really? She is something else, your Kimberly. She once said that she was her father's daughter, and that I truly believe. She planned everything, right from the start. Getting an armed bodyguard. Befriending said bodyguard, learn how to use her weapon. Go running, when she knew—maybe with your help—that the defense attorney had a regular running schedule, out there on Boston Common. All neat and tied up."

No word.

"All neat and tied up," I repeated. "For thee. But not for me. The Massachusetts State Police and other agencies frown upon licensed private investigators losing control of their firearms, and said firearms then being used in the commission of a crime. Do you understand? I could lose my license here in Massachusetts, and in New Hampshire, for what happened."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, I do understand," he said.

"I was hired to provide a service. A bodyguard, to protect your daughter. And nothing else. And the two of you decided to expand my job description without my input or permission."

He looked at me, eyes unblinking, and then opened up his center desk drawer. He took out a large checkbook and opened up the leather cover, and as he took up a fountain pen, he said, "You'll have no problems with your license, Carrie. You can trust me on that."

He quickly wrote a check, tore it off, and passed it over to me. I picked it up and he said, "Fair enough compensation, then, for what happened?"

The zeros seemed to bounce around off the check. I can't be bought, but I can be rented, and this was definitely a significant rent check. Other people would have torn the check in half, tossed it back in his face.

I'm not other people.

I folded it in half and slid it into the pocket of my blazer.

"It'll do," I said.

Now he smiled. "Good. Kimberly sends her best. She apologizes for hitting you, and for taking your pistol."

"Apology acknowledged," I said.

He tilted his head a bit. "Not accepted?"

"Not yet," I said.

Another smile. "I'd like to have you work for me, Carrie. As a regular employee. I like the way you work, the way you think. What do you say?"

I reached to the floor and picked up my purse. "Ralph McKenzie."

"Excuse me?" he said.

"Ralph McKenzie. The guy who raped Kimberly. I did some checking, before I came here today. He was sentenced to a minimum-security facility out West. But he's not there anymore. He got into some scrapes with other inmates, and now he's been transferred. To MCI Cedar Junction. Toughest prison in Massachusetts."

"Really?" he said, and if anything, the twinkle in his eyes seemed brighter.

"Really," I said, standing up. "That was something else, wasn't it? The guy who raped your little girl, to think that he got a reduced sentence, in minimum security. That was unacceptable. But you, the great arranger, made sure he got into some fights, fights that got him transferred, fights that added time to his sentence, fights that put him in a scary place, a place he'll inhabit for quite some time in the future. Maybe a place where he'd be assaulted just like your daughter. Am I right?"

He stood up as well. "My job offer remains. I like you, I like the way you work. What do you say?"

"That I wish I could say the same about you," is what I said, and then I left. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art by Jason Eckhardt

A Nice Old Guy

by Nancy Pickard

When the toddler in the restaurant highchair grinned at Emily, she sensed a movement to her right. She glanced that way and saw a single man waving in a playful way at the little boy. When he realized he'd been caught looking like a doting grandpa, he said across the expanse of his table, to hers, "Do you miss your grandkids as much as I miss mine?"

She nodded her head and grimaced. "It kills me to be away from them."

He was older than her own sixty-five years, she thought, by maybe ten more.

"We all retire to Florida," the man said, speaking of their generation, "thinking it's going to be the good life, but we forget we can't take our grandkids with us. Where are yours?"

"Minneapolis. I wish I was there, when I see little ones like this."

The toddler, she meant. They both stared at the back of the child's head. His young mother was feeding him scrambled eggs from her own plate.

"You'd take the snow and cold again?" the man asked her.

She nodded.

©2008 by Nancy Pickard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I would, too," he admitted.

"Where are yours?"

"New York. They used to live with me, but my son got a job up there."

"I'll bet they miss you."

"I don't know about that," he said with a modest air, "but I sure miss them. How many have you got?"

"One son, three grandchildren. A girl and two boys. Nate, Aston, and Jennifer."

"I've got a Jennifer, too."

She smiled. "Everybody's got a Jennifer."

The man laughed out loud, sounding genuinely amused by her wit, and then he said, "I've also got a Russell and a Jason."

Emily smiled, murmured, "That's nice," and bent her head back toward her own breakfast.

Said the *San Diego Union*: "Nancy Pickard is acclaimed as one of today's best mystery writers. Mounting evidence suggests that this description is too limited. . . . Pickard (is) one of today's best writers period." One of the qualities that makes her so is surely her adeptness at capturing the small but telling moments that mark vital turning points for her characters. Her latest novel, *The Virgin of Small Plains*, is now out in paperback. †

The second day she was seated first, and pretended not to notice when the hostess brought him to the booth he had occupied the day before. She didn't assume he would remember her. And, in fact, he didn't seem to notice she was there, so busy was he with chatting first to the hostess, then to the waitress, then looking over the menu, and then reading his newspaper.

When they finally spoke, it was because they saw twin babies go by in a stroller.

"A double-wide," the man said, and smiled as the little girls passed him.

Emily, who thought that was very funny, laughed as she waved at the children.

It was kind of pathetic, she thought, as she observed other senior citizens break into grins at the adorable sight. They all—*we all,* she corrected herself—flock like lonely gulls if we spot a grandchild, anybody's grandchildren. Florida, the perfect retirement state, could turn out to seem awfully far away from home.

The man in the next booth was still gazing at the twins, and looking a little lost and sad. When he felt her glance, his face brightened again.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning," she said, more sedately.

An awkward moment followed, which he ended by picking up his newspaper. After a moment, however, she heard his voice address-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing her, so she looked up to find that he'd put his paper down again.

"How old are your three?" he asked her.

"You remembered? They're nine, six, and two."

"Somebody's busy," he said, wryly.

"That would be my daughter-in-law. She's home with them."

"Lucky." He looked serious for a moment. "I guess. I don't know what's best anymore. My wife always worked, and I think our son turned out just fine. But now my daughter-in-law worries about being away from home so much."

"It's hard to know the right thing to do."

"It is," he said, before picking up his paper. He put it down again. "I come here for breakfast every morning."

"Good food at a good price."

"It really is."

Both of them seeming satisfied with that bargain, they smiled at one another and got down to eating what was in front of them.

"Would you mind if I join you?" he asked her on the third morning.

"Please do. Have you already eaten?"

"There's still plenty of coffee to drink." He slid onto the red vinyl bench across from her. "I wouldn't want to make them throw any away."

"Yes, that would be such a waste."

They both laughed.

He was about five foot nine inches, Emily had already observed, and he was slim with a narrow face. He wore glasses and he had about six inches of grey-white hair left above his collar, from one ear to the other. He wasn't handsome, and probably never had been, but he was pleasant and respectable looking. Like a retired college professor, or the CEO of a small company, she thought. He wore tan slacks, a white shirt, and a blue-and-tan golf jacket. When he had moved from his booth to hers, she had seen clean white athletic shoes on his feet, with white socks.

"I'm Bob Hearne."

"My name's Emily Steele. Nice to meet you."

"We're nearly old friends by now."

She smiled her agreement back at him.

He was a widower, she discovered from the conversation that ensued as she ate her own light meal. His wife, Ruby, had been gone for three years.

"My husband died five years ago," she told him.

"Is that your wedding ring?"

She looked where he was looking: at the gold band with the big sparkling stone.

"Yes," she said, simply.

"It's spectacular. He must have been a successful fellow." Bob smiled. "Or else, you were."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emily leaned across to whisper, "It's not real."

"What?" He looked shocked, and even a little disappointed, as everybody was when she told them. "It looks as real as any diamond I ever saw!"

"That's what Ted thought when he bought it for me for our thirtieth anniversary," she said, and then she smiled with affectionate rue.

"No! Did he pay a fortune for it?"

Emily nodded. "And all we got was this fake diamond."

"That's terrible! But you still wear it . . ."

She said softly, "It really was the thought that counted."

"You must have loved him very much to forgive him for a boner like that."

Emily shrugged. "We were both idiots about finances. I couldn't throw the first stone." She looked up and grinned at the man across the table. "Although, if I did, I have just the one to do it."

He laughed out loud, and then he reached out and lightly touched the stone.

"In its own way, that's a sweet story."

Emily nodded, and wondered what her late husband would think of Bob.

"I'd swear it's real," he said, staring at it again. "It looks so real. You're not going to tell me that necklace isn't real, either?"

Emily fingered the sparklers on the gold chain around her neck. "Real as plastic. Real as rhinestones."

"Well, then I'm not the judge of things I thought I was, 'cause they sure fooled me."

"I hope they don't fool any burglars or muggers," she admitted. "My son says I'm crazy to keep wearing them."

"I think he may have a point, don't you?"

She rubbed the necklace stones. "Well, if somebody takes them, I won't lose anything but memories."

"Unless they knock you out to do it."

She frowned a little, and he added quickly, "Not that it's any of my business. They're very pretty. They look nice. You should be able to wear them if you want to."

"I do want to," she said, a little stubbornly.

When their bills came, Bob tried to sweep up hers along with his.

"Don't you dare!" she exclaimed.

"But I'd like to."

"Nope." Then, feeling a little bold, she added, "If you ever *asked* me out to eat, that would be one thing, but I brought myself here."

"I'll remember that." He looked into her eyes, with a twinkle in his own blue eyes.

After they paid their separate bills at the cash register, he said, "I usually follow breakfast with a walk along the beach."

Emily smiled, waiting for what she had a feeling was coming.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Would you want to go, too?" he asked her.

"I'd like that," she said, sincerely.

When they walked out the front door, with Bob holding the door for Emily, the woman who had waited on both of them walked toward the front window to watch them go. The hostess, noticing, said, "I think your nice old guy has found himself a new lady friend."

The waitress snapped, "Don't call him that."

"Why not? I thought you said he was—"

"He's not a nice old guy. So don't call him a nice old guy, all right?"

"Well, excuse me," the hostess muttered behind her. "He's always nice to *me*."

The waitress, frowning as she stared at the departing couple, ignored her. Then, on an impulse, she hurried outside the restaurant where she could use her cell phone.

On their walk, Bob told her that he had founded and owned a small company that manufactured a tiny part for airplanes. Ruby had always worked in the business with him, he said. When Emily admitted that she didn't know the first thing about airplanes, he laughed and said, "Between you and me, Ruby never did, either. She didn't even like to fly!"

"Oh, that's funny. I don't feel so bad now, though."

"Oh, don't! It was a pretty boring business."

Emily had to laugh, because he was so frank and honest about it.

They were walking north along the boardwalk, with the ocean gently gobbling up sand to their right, and Art Deco, low-rise condos mixed in with high-rise buildings to their left. There were a lot of For Sale signs. South Florida was experiencing a real-estate glut.

When their shared amusement ebbed, Emily asked gently, "How did she die, Bob?"

He seemed to shudder. "I wish I could say it was something natural, even cancer, as awful as that sounds." He glanced at her, as if to gauge her readiness to hear what he was going to say. "Ruby was killed in a house invasion, Emily. Two men broke in late one night while I was in California on business, and when she woke up and stumbled out to the hallway, they beat her to death with their guns."

"Oh my God!" Emily's hands flew to her mouth.

Before she could ask anything else, and possibly to save her from having to say anything, he said quickly, "How about your husband? I hope it wasn't anything awful, like that."

"A car accident."

"Oh, dear. That's plenty bad enough. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too." Impulsively, she took his hand. "For them. For us."

When she started to let go, he held on to her.

They continued walking down the boardwalk, hand in hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where do you live, Emily?" he asked her a little further down the way.

"A few blocks from the restaurant. It's just a little studio apartment." She smiled and held up her right hand so the wedding ring sparkled in the sunlight. "This was the investment that was supposed to secure my future." With the same hand, she touched her glittering necklace. "And this."

"What did he do?"

"Do?"

"For a living."

"Not much." She laughed, but even now it held an affectionate, tender tone. "Bob, the truth is that my husband bought these pretty things with my money. He bought a lot of other pretty things with my money, too."

"Good grief, Emily. You don't even sound mad about it."

"Oh, what's the point, really? It was inherited, so it's not as if I earned it. And so what if I live in a tiny studio instead of a fancy high-rise? It's a tiny studio two miles from a beach! We had fun while the money lasted. I had lots of fun with him for thirty-five years, and he was a good daddy, too. There are worse things in life than an easygoing husband with no head for business." She laughed, and looked up at him. "Where do you live, Bob?"

He looked a little embarrassed. "In one of those high-rises, Emily. Would you like to come to breakfast there tomorrow?"

She smiled, feeling happy. "And miss our favorite booths and our waitress?"

"I'll fix you something special to make up for it."

He insisted on picking her up at her place and driving her to his.

"We're so close I could have walked," she said, as she opened the door for him the next morning at nine A.M. "And I would have worked up such a good hunger, too, for your special surprise."

"I'm old-fashioned in some ways," he admitted, as he stepped in. "This is very nice, Emily."

"Well, it's not so hard to decorate one little room."

Almost immediately, he walked over to a small painting on a side wall. "Emily, is this what I think it is?"

She came up beside him, standing close. "If you think it's a copy of a little-known van Gogh, then you're right."

"A copy? But those brush strokes . . ."

"Oh, the artist was good, I'll give him that."

Bob, who had bent down to examine the artwork, straightened up and looked at her. "Oh, no, don't tell me."

"Yes." She laughed. "This is another one of Ted's famous bargains."

He started laughing, then stopped himself. "I'm sorry! I shouldn't laugh—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"May as well," Emily assured him. "I do, all the time."

"Where'd he get it?"

"Garage sale. He knew just enough about art to be dangerous."

"So he didn't pay much for it?"

"No, that time, he didn't pay much." She reached out to straighten the painting in its ornate gold-colored frame. There was amusement bubbling under her words. "But he thought he was going to make millions with it, so he *spent* quite a bit of money on things we wanted, in anticipation of making his fortune in art." The bubble broke into a burst of laughter. "It's cheerful, isn't it?"

"Like you," Bob said, with admiration in his voice and his eyes. "Cheerful and really pretty, like you."

She let him kiss her then, briefly and sweetly, like a teenager who wasn't quite sure of himself.

"I'm the only person left on my floor," Bob said as he opened his front door with three keys. "That's why we let the doorman go. Too few people paying too much in residence fees."

"Doesn't it feel lonely? A little spooky?"

"Sometimes, but mostly I kind of like it." He shut the door behind them. "Hell, Emily, I'm already lonely, so what difference is a little more?"

She had only long enough to glimpse a beautiful, spacious apartment with a view of the ocean. Then she turned back around, stepped close to him, put her arms around him, and they hugged each other tight.

"They haven't been in again," the restaurant hostess observed.

"Who?" the waitress asked her.

"That attractive older woman and Mr. I Can't Call Him That."

"What are you talking about?"

"That old man who's nice, but I'm not supposed to say so."

The waitress started paying attention. "They haven't been in? Since when?"

"Since that time they left together."

The waitress turned her face to look out at the sunny day. She didn't say anything, but she frowned as if the sun was too bright for her eyes.

"I thought you always waited on him," the hostess said.

"Not always. He likes that booth, that's all."

"He likes you."

The waitress shrugged. "Are you sure they haven't either of them been in again?"

"Am I standing here every day?"

"Yes."

"So, I'm sure."

The waitress looked at her. "I don't know what to do."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"About what?"

The waitress told her.

"Call the cops," the hostess said, suddenly serious.

"But . . ." The waitress hesitated. ". . . it's just these suspicions I have. How she traded booths so she could sit there. How she kept looking at him until he looked at her. How she made sure she sat next to his favorite booth for the next two mornings. How eager she was to let him sit down with her. And how I know her conniving type. And how I wouldn't trust her any farther than I could throw that big diamond ring of hers. I wonder who bought *that* for her."

"Trust your gut," the hostess advised.

"My gut says he's a nice man who doesn't know a spider when it bites him."

"You told me I couldn't call him that."

"That's not what I meant. He *is* nice. But he's a lot more than just a nice old guy. When you say it like that, it makes old people sound like children. But he's dignified, he was successful, he's had a life. They all have. You should treat them with respect. I always try to treat them with respect."

"Okay, okay! Call the cops. That would show respect."

The waitress took out her cell phone, the one on which she had snapped several photographs of the happy couple on the last day they were in the restaurant.

In a homey cafe in Jacksonville, an attractive older woman smiled at the antics of a little boy jumping up and down on his daddy's lap. She looked up and caught the eye of an even older gentleman who was also amused by the child. He wasn't as easy to snag as the last one had been. Bob. Bob Hearne, who hadn't suspected a thing. Bob, whom she had spotted as prosperous, alone, lonely, and likely.

Bob, whose body could lie in that empty condo for weeks before anybody missed him, or even noticed the strange odor.

Bob, who had credit cards, cash, and his late wife's jewelry.

And a pile of gold coins, which had been a lovely surprise.

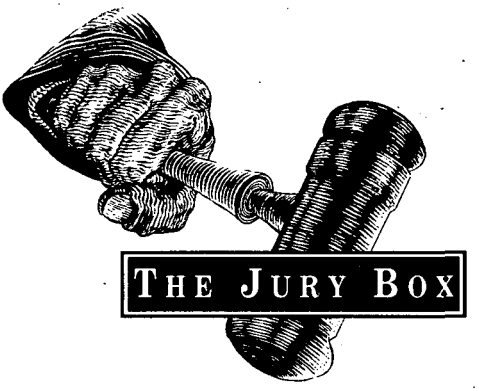
Even with the coins, it had been nowhere near as good a haul as the very real diamond on her right hand or the equally real ones around her neck. And nowhere near as valuable as the authentic van Gogh she had lifted from one man's home. Her son wanted her to sell the damned things, so they couldn't get her in trouble, but she liked them, and she wanted to enjoy some of the pretty things she earned. Emily wasn't worried. She was always gone long before anybody remembered the pretty woman with whom the men had last been seen.

There was nobody to connect her to anything.

When the new man didn't say anything, Emily spoke first.

"Do you miss your grandchildren as much as I miss mine?" ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE JURY BOX

by Jon L. Breen

Ghost stories are like detective stories in their exploration of mysteries, but unlike most detective stories in their recourse to supernatural explanations. Many readers balk at mixing the two genres, but in skilled hands, it can be done. The first two new novels reviewed below (and at least one other I won't identify) consider whether those who have passed on to the next life can communicate with those in this one.

**** Megan Chance: *The Spiritualist,* Three Rivers, $14.95. In 1850s New York, Evelyn Atherton reluctantly attends a séance with lawyer husband Peter, who hopes to contact his recently deceased mother through charismatic medium Michel Jourdain. When Peter is murdered and his prominent family turns against her, Evelyn must clear herself of suspicion among the oppressive, ingrown Manhattan society that inspired Edith Wharton. What seems a grand-tradition gothic takes many unexpected turns, of which the murderer's identity is the most forseeable. Conveying a strong sense of time and place, this expertly written, erotically charged novel is one of the best of the year to date.

*** Loren D. Estleman: *Frames,* Forge, $23.95. In his first book-length case, *EQMM*'s own film detective Valentino acquires a possibly haunted old movie palace and must solve the mystery of the long-ago-murdered skeleton he finds there before the LAPD evidence room claims the fragile lost reels of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed.* The mystery is thin, but the historical tidbits and insights into film and theatre restoration are first-rate.

**** Bill Pronzini: *Fever*, Forge, $24.95. San Francisco's allegedly semi-retired Nameless private eye and his colleagues investigate the disappearance of a gambling-addicted wife and the inexplicable beating of a young straight-arrow computer consultant. Complexity of characterization, puzzle, and theme support the case for Pronzini as the finest American detective novelist in current practice.

*** Martin Edwards: *Waterloo Sunset*, Poisoned Pen, $22.95. In

©2007 by Jon L. Breen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a Liverpool as vividly realized as Pronzini's San Francisco, solicitor and trouble magnet Harry Devlin confronts anonymous messages foretelling his death on Midsummer's Eve and a series of murders of young women working for an escort service. Marked by dry humor (criminal clients are not guilty but "differently innocent") and expert mystery construction, this should prod readers to seek earlier Devlin cases, only a few of which have been published in the U.S.

*** Ed Gorman: *Sleeping Dogs*, St. Martin's Minotaur/Dunne, $23.95. Political consultant Dev Conrad, managing a liberal but libido-challenged Illinois senator's reelection campaign, practices bribery, responds to blackmail, and searches for the perpetrators of sabotage and murder, all in a day's work in his morally ambiguous profession. Lively writing, narrative impetus, noir sensibility, and an insider's jaundiced view of politics equal an election-year winner.

*** James Sallis: *Salt River*, Walker, $21.95. While this third very short novel about small-town Tennessee sheriff John Turner touches on various seemingly unrelated cases in its tangent-prone plot, the main attractions are hypnotically beautiful prose and dialogue directed toward nothing more significant than the meaning of life.

*** Bill Crider: *Of All Sad Words*, St. Martin's Minotaur, $23.95. A much more laid-back sheriff, Dan Rhodes of Blacklin County, Texas, looks into the explosion of a trailer belonging to two brothers and the shooting murder of one of them. Humorous style, quirky characters, and small-town atmosphere are as delightful as ever, and the whodunit fairly resolved, in the fifteenth Rhodes novel.

*** Steven Saylor: *Caesar's Triumph*, St. Martin's Minotaur, $24.95. As celebrations of Julius Caesar's latest triumphs loom, wife Calpurnia enlists aging sleuth Gordianus the Finder to investigate rumors of an assassination conspiracy against the emperor. Cleopatra, Cicero, Marc Antony, and other historical figures make repeat appearances in the latest of an always entertaining and enlightening series.

*** H.R.F. Keating: *Rules, Regs and Rotten Eggs*, St. Martin's Minotaur, $23.95. Detective Superintendent Harriet Martens witnesses the attempted murder of a fox-hunting advocate making a speech at an anti-hunting demonstration. Why, she wonders, did old school friends whisk Robert Roughouse away to an exclusive clinic in the dead of night? A strong example of Keating's colorful, sure-handed storytelling ends with an unusual action climax.

*** Anne Perry: *Buckingham Palace Gardens*, Ballantine, $26. Thomas Pitt, 1890s Special Branch sleuth, investigates the murder of one of several prostitutes hired for the pleasure of the Prince of Wales and his male guests. This series' strongest recent entry delivers what Perry does best: tantalizing plot, small group of characters, claustrophobic atmosphere. Both the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

future king and his long-suffering princess are brought convincingly to life.

*** Joe L. Hensley: *Snowbird's Blood*, St. Martin's Minotaur, $24.95. Terminal-cancer patient Charlie Cannert travels to Florida to look for vanished wife Martha, who had left Chicago seeking a new home for them, and to efficiently eliminate predators of senior citizens. Hensley, who died in 2007 at age 81, makes important points about how American society deals with age and illness in the darkest and most unusual novel of his long career.

*** Richard A. Lupoff: *Quintet: The Cases of Chase and Delacroix*, Crippen & Landru, $43 limited hardcover, $17 trade paper. The five cases of Bay Area amateur sleuths Akhenaton Beelzebub Chase (a Renaissance man whose Philo Vancean erudition extends to offering baseball advice to a young Joe DiMaggio) and beautiful cellist-physician Claire Delacroix recapture the spirit of 1930s America, with topical news references and backgrounds ranging from the theatrical to the nautical and aeronautical. Subtle satire and period atmosphere outshine the plots. A sixth story, set in 1923 and featuring San Francisco reporter Burt Van Hopkins, may prove the most memorable of the lot. The excellent bonus story included with the limited edition, "The Laddie in the Lake," set at a New York youth summer camp in 1946, and half those in the main volume are new to print.

Rescues from out-of-print oblivion are especially welcome with scholarly accoutrements. The 25th volume in Crippen & Landru's Lost Classics series, Mignon G. Eberhart's *Dead Yesterday and Other Stories* ($30 hardbound; $20 trade paper), includes along with fourteen short stories and a novella, all previously uncollected, an extensive bibliography of her magazine fiction compiled by editors Rick Cypert and Kirby McCauley. Rue Morgue Press has reprinted one of the greatest spy novels ever written, Manning Coles's 1940 debut *Drink to Yesterday* ($14.95), with an introduction by publishers Tom and Enid Schantz about the career of Cyril Coles, the British intelligence agent who collaborated with Adelaide Manning on the long series about Tommy Hambledon. Also new from Rue Morgue ($14.95 each) and recommended: the Coles team's sequel *A Toast to Tomorrow* (British title *Pray Silence*), first published in Britain in 1940 and in the U.S. the following year; Stuart Palmer's 1931 novel introducing Hildegarde Withers, *The Penguin Pool Murder*; a 1940 impossible-crime problem by Clyde B. Clason, *Dragon's Cave*; and Catherine Aird's 1966 novel introducing Inspector C.D. Sloan, *The Religious Body*.

The 75th anniversary edition of Vincent Starrett's classic 1933 study *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, edited by Raymond Betzner (Gasogene, $29.95), includes an annotated bibliography of the book's various editions and extensive introductory material.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The War in Wonderland

by Edward D. Hoch

Ed Hoch fans take heart: We have one more new story written for *EQMM* coming up in December, and we are also anticipating a completed version of the tale the author was working on at the time of his death. Meanwhile, we present, this month and next, stories never before seen in the U.S. but previously published in England. This story won the 2005 Barry Award—an unusual choice, for the Barry is sponsored by the American journal *Deadly Pleasures*, and the story was not then available in the U.S. ¶

Sid Jenkins was usually first up in the morning, and the others got to thinking he must be able to sense the rising of the sun because there were no windows and few clocks in their abode. Seven of them resided in their cramped underground quarters, not quite enough for two tables of bridge, but then there was always one person on guard duty anyway, every night.

They were in the north of England, in an area of Cheshire farmland remote from the bombs that fell nightly on Liverpool and Manchester. Their job was simple. The five men and two women assigned here were the entire staff of an installation known officially as Carroll Field. It had been named after Lewis Carroll, of *Alice in Wonderland* fame, who had grown up in the nearest village, where his father had been the local vicar.

"Everyone up!" Jenkins called out, ringing the breakfast bell in the cramped galley. Amanda stumbled from the bathroom, still half asleep, and started helping him with breakfast preparations. "How'd you sleep?" he asked, as he did every morning, more to start a conversation than anything else.

"Fitfully, dear boy." Amanda was an attractive redhead in her mid thirties, only a decade older than Jenkins, but since he was one of

©2003 by Edward D. Hoch. First published in Great Britain in 2003 by The Do-Not Press Limited.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the younger men she tended to consider him as little more than a prep-school lad. "We could do with a little fresh air in this place."

"The ventilation system—"

"Sod the ventilation system! We're buried underground like gophers, with only a little night-light to find our way to the toilet." She started cracking eggs in the frying pan as they heard the others coming awake.

Captain Roger Seaborn, the ranking officer in the detachment, was the first to join them. He was a handsome, quiet man who walked with a limp he'd acquired after his Spitfire made a bad landing. They'd told him the assignment to Carroll Field was only temporary until his leg healed, but he grew more impatient with each passing day. "Good morning," he greeted them. "Is Private Silcrest still upstairs?"

Amanda Flower glanced at the wall clock. "He's on watch for another ten minutes."

"Tell him to come down for breakfast with us. The Huns aren't going to bomb us after sunrise."

Their underground bunker was about a quarter-mile from the airfield, out of harm's way unless the German bombs were off-target. It was the possibility of a bad aim that kept them underground each night, waiting for an attack that might never come. Captain Seaborn liked to say they were one of the few outposts whose mission would be a failure if they weren't bombed.

"I'll go get him," Jenkins said, nodding toward Grace Foley and Raster as he opened the steel door and went up the spiral staircase. The guard post was just below ground level, with a periscope affording a view in all directions. As he climbed the stairs he heard voices, and recognized that of their only nearby neighbor, a farm wife named Alice Cleatworth who came by every day with fresh eggs and vegetables and milk, paid for by the government.

"Good morning, Private Jenkins," she greeted him, handing over her usual basket of food through the raised metal door into what they all called the rabbit hole. Silcrest accepted it gently, aware of the eggs inside.

"How's the weather out today?" Jenkins asked.

"Perfect for late summer. Get out of your rabbit hole and enjoy it!"

"We'll be out soon enough." After Mrs. Cleatworth returned to her truck, Jenkins told Silcrest to come down for breakfast with the others.

The young private hesitated. "Are you sure it's all right? I don't want to be court-martialed for leaving my post."

"The captain said to get you. Come on."

Grace Foley, a charming Irish lass about Jenkins's age, met them at the bottom of the stairs and took the basket. "Did you see any planes?" she asked Silcrest.

"Not a one. I'd have sounded the alarm if I did."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You were probably sleeping." She liked to kid Silcrest and she laughed when he quickly denied the accusation.

They clustered around the dining table, which was a bit crowded for seven people. Jenkins always helped the women with the food before settling down himself. By then he was often at the head of the table because Captain Seaborn avoided showing his authority whenever possible, seating himself casually on the side. It was only after tea and coffee had been served that he shifted from small talk to the day's routines.

"Raster, how are you coming with the tank?" he asked the muscular young man who occupied the foot of the table opposite Jenkins.

"It'll be done today, Captain. Then the ladies can do a fine paint job on it."

Amanda Flower joined the conversation. "Camouflage?"

"The usual bit. Not too good or Jerry might not see it from the air."

"Should we keep working on the planes?" This last question came from Sergeant Leonard. Like the captain, he was recuperating from a minor injury and viewed his tour of duty at Carroll Field as a mere stumbling block in his military career. The others were all of lower rank, mainly privates like Jenkins, though ranks were unimportant at Carroll Field. All of them worked together.

"Affirmative," the captain responded. "Jenkins, you'll come with us. The ladies will get their paint cans ready, and Silcrest, you'll get a few hours' sack time."

"I'm on guard duty tonight," Jenkins reminded him.

"Right you are. You can knock off when Silcrest wakes up to relieve you on the work detail."

Twenty minutes later they emerged through the metal door with its covering of artificial grass. Jenkins squinted against the brightness of the morning sun and turned to help Grace up the last few steps of the ladder. "I wish you were working with us today," he told her with a smile. Behind them, Silcrest lowered the hidden entrance and locked it from inside.

"I'll bring the lunch around," Grace said quietly.

"Is that a promise?"

"Sure!"

He watched the two women walking across the grass toward Carroll Field, wishing he was with them instead of Raster. There was something about the man that he disliked, and he distrusted him around women. Perhaps it was the odor of masculinity that seemed to cling to him. Even now he wore only an undershirt and pants, and Jenkins suspected he would shed the undershirt before long.

For his part, Jenkins walked faster to keep up with Captain Seaborn and the sergeant. Their course was slightly different, aimed at the big corrugated hangar that stood next to the landing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strip. There were eight Spitfires already on view along the field, and with luck they'd add two more by the end of the day. "After we get twenty, we'll switch to medium bombers," Seaborn told them. "Headquarters will be sending up the templates next week."

Passing the line of completed planes, Jenkins was struck again by the flimsy nature of their deception. These were only flat pieces of painted plywood, nailed together to form the body, wings, and tail assembly of Spitfires. But photographed from the air by German reconnaissance flights, they just might fool someone back in Berlin. The long-range plan was to keep building these shabby replicas of fighter planes and medium bombers, adding occasional tanks and trucks, so that Carroll Field ultimately became not just an air base but a possible staging area for a future invasion of France. Perhaps the Germans might risk a night raid to destroy the airfield. If so, the RAF could intercept them as they headed home.

In the hangar he set to work with Captain Seaborn and Sergeant Leonard, sawing the large sheets of plywood into their proper lengths. "This is tough work for an officer," Leonard remarked.

Seaborn snorted. "I grew up on a farm before the war. I'm used to work a great deal more difficult than this. Pass me that template, will you, Jenkins?"

He handed it over. "Still, sir, I imagine you'd much rather be back in combat."

"And I will be, as soon as this leg heals properly."

They worked steadily through the morning, pausing only for a bit of lunch that Grace brought around in a paper sack. Jenkins gave her a wink. He slid his hand on to hers but she slapped it gently away. "What have you got that's good to eat?"

"The usual sandwiches," she told him. "Amanda made them up. Mrs. Cleatworth brought a head of lettuce today so that's an extra bonus. I have hot tea in the thermos."

Jenkins called out to Captain Seaborn and Leonard, who were assembling the plywood body of the Spitfire. "Lunch is here!"

"Ah!" the captain said, putting down his hammer and walking over to join them. "It's our personal angel."

Grace blushed and looked away. "Only a delivery girl when I'm not painting plywood planes. Amanda makes the sandwiches."

The captain took one for himself and another for Sergeant Leonard. "I'll be back for our tea," he said.

When they were alone, Jenkins asked, "Is Raster giving you any trouble?"

"Oh, him! Amanda and I don't pay any attention to what he says."

"You should report him to the captain if he makes improper advances."

"I'm a big girl, Sid. I can take care of myself."

"I know you can. I guess I'm a little bit jealous."

She sighed and glanced around, making certain the other two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were far enough away. "I want to be with you, really I do. But I don't see any way we can work it. The captain never lets more than one of us at a time go on a weekend pass."

"I'll try to work something out," he promised.

Silcrest came out to relieve him around two o'clock, insisting he'd had enough sleep. "Go ahead, Jenkins, get a few hours in before you have to pull guard duty. Looking through that periscope all night would make anyone drowsy."

"I know. I've done it plenty of times." Captain Seaborn didn't pull guard duty himself unless someone was ill or on weekend pass. That meant the rest of them had it every sixth night.

"There's a full moon tonight, a bomber's moon. Maybe they'll come after us."

"I hope so."

Jenkins rested for a few hours, dozing on and off without really falling into a deep sleep. The underground quarters had just three bedrooms, which meant that Captain Seaborn and Sergeant Leonard shared one, the two women shared one, and Jenkins shared one with Raster and young Silcrest. It was good being alone in the windowless room, even if only for a short time, and he almost resented the intrusion when he heard one of the others inserting a long-stemmed key into the hidden lock to open the rabbit hole.

It proved to be Amanda Flower, who glanced briefly into his room on her way to the bathroom. Peering at his watch Jenkins saw that it was nearly five. The others would be returning shortly.

He got up, stretched, and went into the small galley to help Amanda with the evening meal.

She seemed surprised to see him cutting up some of the farmer's tomatoes when she came out of the bathroom. "Dear boy, you should be getting some rest for guard duty."

"It's not easy sleeping down here."

"You don't have to tell me that." She took his knife from his hand and started in on the tomatoes. "I'll have to take a sleeping powder tonight if I'm to get any rest at all. You'd better not try waking me with the alarm while you're up there at the periscope tonight."

Jenkins chuckled at the thought of it. "I think we'll sit out the entire war here without catching sight of a single German bomb."

"I hope you're right."

The others straggled in and gathered around the table. Captain Seaborn switched on the radio to the BBC so they could hear the latest war news. It was a nightly ritual with them, though the news these days was rarely good. "They'll come one of these nights," Raster said, downing his daily ration of beer. "They'll come and bomb us and we'll die in our beds."

"You almost sound as if that would please you," Grace said.

"Not please me, no. I'd much rather die in bed with you, little girl."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Enough of that!" Sergeant Leonard barked. "Or I'll have you up on charges."

"Sorry," Raster mumbled into his beer.

Captain Seaborn cleared his throat. "Our rules are pretty lax in this outfit, but we are still subject to regulations. Any infractions will be severely dealt with. That goes for Private Raster and everyone else."

A brief silence settled over the table. Finally, as the meal was nearing its conclusion, Amanda Flower suggested a game of bridge. They usually played two or three nights a week, so the suggestion was not unexpected. "I'm on guard duty," Jenkins reminded them, and Raster excused himself, too.

"The rest of you play," Captain Seaborn said. "I'll do some reading tonight."

So Amanda got out the cards and teamed with Sergeant Leonard against Grace and Silcrest. They'd lingered longer than usual over dinner, so Jenkins climbed the spiral staircase to his periscope lookout even though the late summer sun hadn't yet set. It was a useless task, really, but someone had to do it. One of these nights the Germans just might be foolish enough to bomb the place and they'd have to scramble the RAF squadron.

He checked the alarm button and the portable toilet, then picked up one of those slim paperbound books they were printing for the armed forces. *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton. He'd certainly rather be in Shangri-La with Grace than here at Carroll Field.

Sometime around one he noticed that the full moon had risen, bathing the landscape in an unreal silvery glow. This was indeed a bomber's moon, as Silcrest had said. He made a note of it in his log. It was a warm night and he had slipped off his shirt. The remainder of the time passed uneventfully as he nervously awaited the dawn. He hadn't slept a wink or even dozed. The early sun finally appeared in the east and through his periscope he could see Mrs. Cleatworth's truck approaching along the road with her daily basket, a bit earlier than usual.

When the farmer's wife was almost up to the rabbit hole, Jenkins raised the grass-covered door to greet her. "Good morning, Mrs. Cleatworth. Have you brought us anything special?"

"I don't know about special," the farmer's wife answered, "but these tomatoes are even better than the ones I brought yester—" Her words were cut off by a sudden shriek from below. "My God, what's that?"

"I don't know. Stay right here. I'll be back." Jenkins hurried down the spiral staircase as fast as he could. He paused on the bottom step, seeing that it had been Amanda who screamed. She was in the galley standing over a body and he knew it was Sergeant Leonard. Almost at once the others appeared from their rooms.

"What happened?" Captain Seaborn asked, bending to examine the sergeant's bloodied chest and the kitchen knife on the floor next

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the body.

"I . . . I found him like this. Is he—?"

"Dead for some hours. Rigor mortis is already setting in."

Raster and Grace and Silcrest had joined them by now, each barely able to comprehend what they were seeing. Jenkins remembered Mrs. Cleatworth waiting by the open door. "I'll be right back," he said, hurrying up the stairs.

"What's going on?" the farmer's wife wanted to know.

"There's been an accident. I'll have to close up now." He took the basket, his heart pounding, and tried to smile as he closed the door.

Back downstairs, Captain Seaborn was issuing crisp orders. "Amanda, get on the radio to Headquarters, tell them what's happened."

"What *has* happened?" she asked. "Sergeant Leonard is dead but—"

"All right," he said with some exasperation. "Everyone gather round and we'll talk this out before she calls."

They obeyed him, settling into chairs, and Jenkins carefully skirted the blood on the floor to join them. "Can't someone cover him up?" Grace asked, then answered her own question by disappearing into the bedroom and returning with a sheet.

Seaborn waited until she'd settled down before he spoke. "It's clear that sometime during the night Sergeant Leonard was murdered, stabbed to death with one of the knives we were using to cut up the vegetables. Now there are only six of us here, and no one entered through the only doorway, the rabbit hole. That's correct, isn't it, Jenkins?"

"Correct, sir. I opened the door only for Mrs. Cleatworth, who arrived just as Amanda discovered the body."

"Do you have the guards' logbook?"

"I'll get it."

The captain flipped through it, confirming what Jenkins had said. "So that leaves the five of us who were down here with him. I was asleep. I never heard him get up. Amanda?"

"I took a powder to help me sleep. I didn't hear a thing."

"I was asleep, too," Grace said.

"How about you, Raster? You've had some run-ins with the sergeant."

"If I'd killed him, you'd know about it. I'd be asking for a medal."

Silcrest, the youngest of them, insisted they'd both been asleep the entire night. "It was her scream that woke us."

"Could he have stabbed himself?" Jenkins suggested.

"Why would he do that?"

"I don't know," he admitted, unable to come up with a likely reason.

Seaborn shook his head. "If he wanted to kill himself, he had a service revolver he could have used. That would be much more likely than stabbing oneself in the chest and then pulling out the knife.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In any event, I'll have to report this to Colonel Yardley."

"You're saying one of us is a killer?" Grace asked. "Who would want to kill Sergeant Leonard?" She avoided glancing at Raster as she spoke.

"An enemy agent," Seaborn suggested. "A spy."

It was Amanda who spoke up then. "Someone who's planning to kill us all, one at a time?"

"That's crazy!" Raster barked. "You people are living in Wonderland."

"Perhaps we are," she agreed. "We're down a rabbit hole, at an unreal airfield named for Lewis Carroll, and we even have two queens." She patted her hair. "I suppose I'm the Red Queen, so you must be the White Queen, Grace."

Grace smiled. "Well, I suppose the captain and the sergeant must be the kings, and you would make a nice White Rabbit, Jenkins, since you were at the top of the rabbit hole last night." She turned to Raster. "Would you like to be the Mad Hatter?"

"You're all loony," was his reply.

"And Silcrest, you can be the Mock Turtle."

Captain Seaborn was running out of patience. "Let's not forget there's a dead man under that sheet. This isn't a matter for fun and games. I'm calling the major on the emergency frequency." He went off to his room where the radio was kept.

When he was gone, Raster was the first to speak. "You're all loony," he said again. "You're just a bunch of misfits no good for combat. That's why they have you up here building wooden planes in the middle of the woods."

"And what about yourself?" Amanda asked. "That uniform in your room has had stripes cut off the sleeve. A demotion, perhaps?"

Raster didn't answer, and young Silcrest spoke up. "We don't have an Alice."

"What?"

"An Alice in Wonderland. You've assigned parts for all of us but there is no Alice."

"Matter of fact, there is," Jenkins reminded them. "Alice Cleatworth, the farmer's wife who brings us the basket each morning."

"I don't know that we can count her," Amanda said. "She's never been down the rabbit hole."

Captain Seaborn returned at that moment. "We're to suspend all operations pending the arrival of investigating officers in a few hours. I've also been instructed to do a visual check of everyone's garments for bloodstains, and to collect everyone's footgear for testing. Including my own."

They bent grimly to remove their shoes and slippers. The fantasy of *Alice in Wonderland* had burst like a soap bubble.

After dressing, they wandered outside to eat their breakfast. No

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one wanted to eat in sight of Leonard's body. It was another perfect August day and Jenkins sat cross-legged in the grass with his toast and tea. He could see the hangar off in the distance, deserted now, though he knew the captain would walk over to inspect it shortly.

"Out of the rabbit hole!" Amanda Flower announced as she reached the surface. Grace was with her and walked over to sit by Jenkins. She'd put on pants and a uniform shirt, though he was still in his undershirt. "This is a terrible thing," she said, "and doubly terrible because one of us must have killed him. What will the investigators do?"

Jenkins shrugged. "Ask a lot of questions, I suppose. Check all of our records."

"I've got no record. I've only been in the service for six months. What about you?"

Jenkins was silent for a moment. "I got busted once for fighting. I'm no spy."

She glanced out at the road. "How long will it take them to get here?"

"At least an hour."

But he'd miscalculated badly. Just because Carroll Field was a fake, from which none of its planes would ever fly, he'd forgotten that planes could certainly land there. Fifteen minutes later, a twin-engined RAF transport settled onto the runway and rolled to a stop in front of the hangar. Captain Seaborn seemed surprised to see them that soon, too, and ran out to meet them.

Three men emerged from the plane, one of them carrying a leather satchel. Jenkins couldn't tell if they were RAF or Scotland Yard investigators, though it would have been a bit too soon for Scotland Yard. Seaborn spoke with them at length, gesturing occasionally toward the rabbit hole, and Jenkins told Grace, "You'd better round up the others. They'll want to question everyone."

When Seaborn reached them with the new arrivals, two of the dark-suited men didn't wait to be introduced, hurrying down the rabbit hole with the satchel. The other one, a middle-aged man with a puffy face and hair graying at the temples, was named Mr. Hill, with no first name or rank given. Silcrest and Raster and Amanda had joined them by this time, and Captain Seaborn introduced each of the six.

Mr. Hill tried on a smile for size, found it didn't fit, and said briskly to the captain, "Personnel files, please."

"They're down below. I'll get them."

"Yours, too," Mr. Hill reminded him. Then he asked, "Which one is Jenkins?"

"I am, sir."

"Good. You were on guard duty, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are your duties at your post?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"To watch for enemy planes. If any appear, or if any bombs are dropped on Carroll Field, the guard on duty is to ring the alarm and notify the nearest RAF squadron at once."

"Has that ever happened?"

"Not yet, sir."

"How long is your shift?"

"From sundown to daybreak, unless relieved sooner."

"Do you keep a logbook?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'd like to see it."

By that time, Captain Seaborn had returned with the seven personnel folders. "Let's go downstairs where we can sit," Hill suggested.

The other two men had been busy downstairs. Photographs had been taken and Sergeant Leonard's body was wrapped in a canvas bag, ready for transport. "Lots of blood around here," one of the investigators noted. "There were spots of it on the bottom of all seven pairs of shoes and slippers."

"We walked around," Grace told him. "After Amanda found the body. Her scream woke us."

Mr. Hill thought about it. "The killer must have got some blood on his or her clothing."

"In the middle of the night he could have been nude," Captain Seaborn pointed out. "I sleep in the nude."

"Really?" Amanda asked with a smile. "So do I."

Hill frowned. "But you all took time to slip on shoes or slippers, and a robe or something when Private Flower screamed."

"We don't run around naked," the captain told him. "And this cement floor is rough on bare feet. Robes and footwear are always at the ready in the event of an attack."

The investigator made more notes. "I'll want to talk with each of you individually, Captain Seaborn first and then the women."

The individual interviews were held in Seaborn's bedroom, which he'd shared with the dead man. While Jenkins waited, he washed his face and put on a clean shirt, trying to make himself presentable. When his turn came he entered with some trepidation to find the dark-suited investigator seated at Seaborn's little desk with a personnel folder open before him. "Private Jenkins?"

"That's right, sir."

"You don't have to call me 'sir.' Mr. Hill will do."

"All right."

"What do you know about all this?"

"Not much, Mr. Hill. I was on guard duty when it happened."

"But wouldn't you have heard the sounds of a scuffle?"

"It's not likely. That steel door pretty much blocks out the sound from below."

"Let's see . . . I understand you were friendly with Grace Foley."

"You get friendly with people when you're living and working

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with them day and night."

"Is it a romantic relationship?"

"No. There's no possibility of that the way we live here."

"The others say you all got along quite well, except for Sergeant Leonard and Private Raster."

"I'd say so, yes."

"Is Raster a violent man?"

"I think he could be. His language is coarse and it grates on people."

"I note in your personnel file that you were demoted for fighting at your previous post."

"Had a bit too much to drink," Jenkins admitted, looking away. "It hasn't happened since."

"Sergeant Leonard was killed with one of the kitchen knives, probably something the killer found there."

"They keep a little night-light burning over the sink. There's always a knife."

Hill consulted one of his papers. "There was a full moon last night, rising at twenty-three fifty-five hours, and the sky was clear. I assume you would have seen anyone approaching the bunker."

"There was no one," Jenkins said. "Not until Mrs. Cleatworth came this morning with our fresh provisions. That's always after sunrise."

"I believe that's all, Jenkins. You may go. Send in Private Silcrest next."

Jenkins went up the spiral staircase to the outer door, anxious for fresh air. Grace and Amanda were up there, too, with Raster hovering nearby as usual. "How did it go with you?" Grace asked.

"Routine. I couldn't help them."

"Is Silcrest in there now?"

Jenkins nodded. "He's the last of us."

Raster strolled over to join them. "Better not get too chummy with these ladies, Jenkins. There's a good chance one of them killed the sergeant."

"No one had a motive to kill him, Raster, except maybe you."

"There were only five of us down there with him," Raster countered. "I didn't do it, and Silcrest wouldn't hurt a fly. The captain could have got Leonard transferred if he didn't like him. That only leaves the ladies." His voice seemed to reflect the hint of the leer on his face. Jenkins had to restrain himself or he would have punched the man.

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't I? It's always love or money, the only two motives for murder when you come right down to it."

"This murder had no motive that I can see," Amanda told them. "It's almost as if Alice fell down the rabbit hole and killed him."

Jenkins frowned. "You mean Alice Cleatworth? She couldn't have—"

Amanda laughed. "No, silly! I mean Alice in Wonderland. Remember our conversation earlier?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Someone had a motive," Grace insisted. "It's just that we can't see what it was."

Captain Seaborn came up from below with Silcrest following. "They're removing Sergeant Leonard's body and then they're going to clean up the place for us. We'd better go over to the hangar and sort this out, decide how to work our shifts until they send us a replacement."

"Do you mean they're leaving us here?" Grace asked. "When they know one of us is a murderer? I won't be able to sleep all night."

"I'm sure Private Flower could give you one of her sleeping powders," the captain replied.

Jenkins was watching Seaborn's face as he spoke the words, and he saw the captain's eyebrows rise as if he'd just come up with the answer on a final examination. The others had started across the field toward the hangar, and looking back at the rabbit hole Jenkins saw the two men in black suits lifting the canvas-shrouded body to the surface.

"I have to get something from my room," he told the captain. "I'll catch up with you."

Jenkins trotted back to the entrance and slid into the little lookout box where he'd spent the night. He paused only a moment to be certain Mr. Hill and the other two men were all busy with the body, determining the easiest way to get it over to their plane. Hill yelled to Captain Seaborn that he needed a couple of men to help them carry their canvas burden. Seaborn called for Raster and Silcrest to help. Jenkins remained in his compartment, out of sight, watching them through the periscope. Then he turned away, bent down, and carefully lifted the lid from the chemical toilet.

He was just pulling the bloody shirt from its hiding place when Captain Seaborn appeared in the doorway holding his service revolver. "Leave it right there, Jenkins," he commanded. "I'm charging you with the murder of Sergeant Leonard."

A few minutes later, downstairs in the captain's bedroom, Jenkins was confronted by Seaborn and Mr. Hill. The bloody shirt was on the table between them and Jenkins moistened his lips, waiting for the first question. "Why did you do it?" Hill asked.

"An accident . . ." Jenkins's voice was little more than a croak.

It was Captain Seaborn who spoke. "Your fondness for Grace Foley was quite obvious. When Amanda Flower announced she was taking a sleeping powder last night, you saw a chance to be with Grace, in her room, while Amanda was fast asleep. You deserted your post and came down to the kitchen, and ran right into Sergeant Leonard. Leaving your post in wartime is a serious court-martial offense. You'd been demoted for fighting before and you knew you had to silence Leonard. You grabbed the first weapon your fingers came upon, a kitchen knife, and stabbed him in the chest."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I didn't mean to kill him. I didn't know what I was doing."

"You had to remove your bloody shirt, of course, so you stuffed it in the chemical toilet. When you knew these men would be cleaning up the place, you feared they might find it, so you tried to remove it just now."

Mr. Hill nodded. "That was good work, Captain, but how did you come to suspect Jenkins?"

"There were three things, really. The full moon rose just before midnight, but he didn't record it in his log until an hour later. He didn't notice it sooner because he was down here stabbing Leonard, and after that he was probably in no shape to notice anything for some time. Also, your investigators found blood on the bottoms of all the shoes and slippers, but I remembered Jenkins stood on the bottom step when he came down, and he avoided the blood later. His shoes should have been free of it. And then there was this shirt, of course. Since there was blood on the floor it was more than likely the killer had a few spots on him, too. Jenkins had removed his shirt and apparently left it in the guard cubicle instead of bringing it down with him."

"He told me I could be shot for leaving my post," Jenkins said, not meeting their eyes. "I just wanted to save myself, to get away from him."

"You did it all for the love of that woman?" Mr. Hill asked, producing a pair of handcuffs.

Jenkins had to agree. He remembered Raster's words: The only two motives for murder were love or money. ●

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

Ellery Queen August 2008

Advertise to the world's largest mystery magazine audience with our Ellery Queen/Alfred Hitchcock combined classified section. Ad rates per issue: $4.95 per word (10 word minimum), $350 per column inch (2.25 inch maximum). Special introductory offer: Buy two ads and receive a third ad FREE. Send orders to: Dell Magazines, Classified Department, 475 Park Ave. S., 11th Floor, New York, New York 10016. Direct inquiries to: (212) 686-7188; Fax: (212) 686-7414; or email: adsales@dellmagazines.com

AUTHORS

Check: www.barrylongyear.net Enemy Mine. All books in print.

MERCHANDISE

Murder Mystery Theme Party Game Kits for 4-400 Guests! www.dinnerandamurder.com

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

Free download of complete *Pharmacology Is Murder* at www.dirk-wyle.com/downld.htm

Marlowe's Mysteries. Mystery books and more, for the collector and reader. www.marlowesmysteries.com.

INTEREST TO ALL

The Foolscap Society Practicing the Art of Deduction. Qualifying puzzler and membership information, $10 US to: PO Box 44, Nallen, WV 26680. foolscapsociety@gmail.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT ISSUE...

The Rock
BY EDWARD D. HOCH

Murder at Montefugoni
BY MARGARET MARON

Split/Brain
BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

What Happened to Mary?
BY BILL PRONZINI

Visit us at:
www.themysteryplace.com

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. Vol. 132, No. 2. Whole No. 804, August 2008. ISSN 0013-6328. USPS 523-610. Dell GST# R123054108. Published monthly except for combined March/April and September/October double issues by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications. 1-year subscription $55.90 in U.S. and possessions, in all other countries $65.90 (GST included in Canada), payable in advance in U.S. funds. Call 800-220-7443 with questions about your suscription. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855. Editorial Offices, 475 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10016. Executive Office, 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855-1220. Periodical postage paid at Norwalk, CT and additional mailing offices. Canadian postage paid at Montreal, Quebec, Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 40012460. ©2008 Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications, all rights reserved. Dell is a trademark registered in the U.S. Patent Office. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Submissions must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855. In Canada return to Quebecor St. Jean, 800 Blvd. Industrial, St. Jean, Quebec J3B 8G4. For back issues, send your check for $5.50 (U.S. funds) to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Suite SM-100, 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855-1220. Please specify the issue you are ordering. Add $2 per copy for delivery outside the U.S.

PRINTED IN CANADA

PRINTED WITH SOY INK

JANET HUTCHINGS
Editor

EMILY GIGLIERANO
Editorial Assistant

SUSAN KENDRIOSKI
Executive Director,
Art & Production

VICTORIA GREEN
Senior Art Director

IRENE LEE
Production Artist/
Graphic Designer

CAROLE DIXON
Senior Production Manager

EVIRA MATOS
Production Associate

ABIGAIL BROWNING
Manager, Subsidiary Rights
& Marketing

BRUCE W. SHERBOW
Vice President,
Sales & Marketing

SANDY MARLOWE
Circulation Services

JULIA McEVOY
Manager, Advertising Sales

PETER KANTER
Publisher

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief 1941-1982

ELEANOR SULLIVAN
Editor-in-Chief 1982-1991

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
CONNIE GOON
Advertising Sales Coordinator
Phone: (212) 686-7188
Fax: (212) 686-7414
(Display and Classified Advertising)

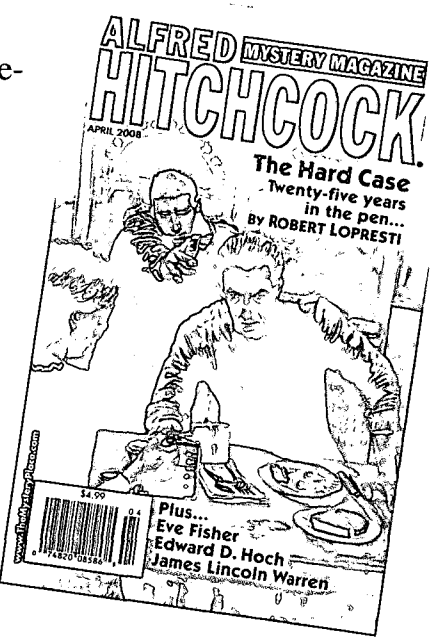
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE 60%!

Now get 6 issues of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine delivered conveniently to your door and SAVE 60% off the newsstand price!

You'll receive 6 entertaining issues* full of suspenseful stories, including never-before-published works by world renowned mystery writers.

That's over $27.00 worth of delightful mystery magazines delivered right to your home for just $10.97!
You save over $16.00!



Order today and SAVE!

To charge your order to MC or Visa, call
TOLL-FREE 1-800-220-7443
(8am-7pm EST) Orders only, please!

BY MAIL

Alfred Hitchcock, Suite S, 6 Prowitt St.
Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first issue. Outside U.S.A.: Add $6 per year for shipping and handling (U.S. funds). WA residents: Add state and local taxes to your total order. *We publish double issues twice a year which count as four issues toward your subscription.
Offer expires 9/30/09.

28C-NZPFL2

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TheMysteryPlace.com

Visit www.TheMysteryPlace.com, home of the world's leading short-fiction mystery magazines. Log on and enjoy:

- **Excerpts of current stories from the genre's leading authors**
- **Readers' Forum**
- **Awards lists**
- **Book reviews**
- **Mystery puzzles**

All this and much more!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE®

ELLERY QUEEN® MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Visit us at www.themysteryplace.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED